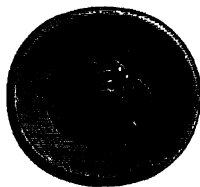


LIVES
OF
THE GREEK HEROINES.

BY LOUISA MENZIES,
AUTHOR OF "LEGENDARY TALES OF THE ANCIENT BRITONS."



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TO
MISS EMILY DAVIES

THIS BOOK IS INSCRIBED IN TESTIMONY OF
THE HONOUR IN WHICH SHE
IS HELD BY THE
AUTHOR.

October, 1879

PREFACE.

A LITTLE book bearing as its title "Lives of the Greek Heroines" seems scarcely to require a word of introduction. The women who have been made famous by the genius of Homer, of Aeschylus, and of Sophocles, have so stamped their noble and vigorous nature into the literature of Europe that their names have a familiar ring in the verses, even of the modern poet.

To give a true picture of these women and of their lives and occupations is all that the writer of the following pages has aimed at. To have entered on the field of comparative mythology, however inviting it may look, would have been foreign to the purpose with which the work was undertaken, which was to show that, whatever ideas they might or might not

embody, to the poets who sung of them, the Greek Heroines were as really and as truly *women*, with minds to think and hearts to feel, as Portia and Lady Macbeth were to Shakespeare.

Should these pages lead any woman to study one of the finest and purest literatures in the world, or help to clear away the notion that Classic learning is unsuitable to women, the writer will be amply rewarded.

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LIVES OF THE GREEK HEROINES.

NIOBE.

TO the boy Amphion, dwelling among the shepherds with his brother Zethus, through the crafty cruelty of their stepmother Dircé, came the gracious Hermes with a lyre like that which he gave to Phœbus, his brother, to console him when banished from Olympus; and so well did Amphion study the art which the god taught him, that he drew from the lyre sounds so sweet and so stirring that the rugged tempers of the country folk were softened and a longing after a higher life than that they had hitherto known was awakened in them; so that, little by little, he taught them to look to the common good of all as the first object of desire, to work together for mutual help and comfort, instead of seeking each man only his own profit: and because he showed them how to build out of trees and stones, houses, temples and strong defensive walls, men have said that at his singing trees and stones followed him.

And now Thebes, his fair city, had risen, and the thriving industry of his people had made it famous and populous, but there was still something wanting to make the happiness of the minstrel-king complete. Zethus, his brother, cared not for life in a town; the open plains and the rush of the foaming wild boar were more to his taste, with no dome above his head but the vault of heaven, and no walls but the blue hills; and in the spacious, many-chambered palace which rose in the wide market-place, there dwelt indeed the honoured Antiope, restored to her royal palace by the virtue of her sons, but no other lady, only hand-maidens and attendants. Where could Amphion seek the queen who should be worthy to dwell with him in his palace, to order all things duly, to direct the labours of the women, and fill the cedar chests with beautiful garments fit for the necks of kings—where could he find a woman whom he would gladly have sitting at his hearth, who would offer sacrifice for him when affairs of state drew him from his home, who would give him children to adorn his manhood and to protect his age—where could he find her who should be worthy of the love of the king and of the poet?

In many princely houses throughout the Achæan land lovely maidens were growing up, but bard and traveller alike joined to praise Niobe, the daughter of Tantalus and of Taygete, the Pleiad, the granddaughter of highest Jove: and so often did Amphion hear of her beauty and her endowments that his mind

became full of the thought of her; and persuading Zethus, his brother, to forego his country life and dwell within the city while he should be away, he set out with his lyre to pleasant Phrygia, where, by the pebbly Hermus, rose the royal house of Tantalus on its lofty marble pillars. Amphion did not approach the palace in a chariot or with a royal retinue; he preferred to come in the dress of a shepherd, thinking that in this lowly guise he would best learn the nature of the princess he had come to seek. He was too wise to ask her in marriage until his own eyes had justified the report of men. So he hired himself as a helper to the king's herdsman, and was gladly accepted for the great knowledge that he had of cattle. Thus he dwelt for a time in the pastures at the foot of Mount Sipylus, where the princess often came with her maidens to gather garlands for the temples or to play at ball, and there Amphion saw her, beautiful and strong, with that divine light about her which might be looked for in a maiden in whose veins a strain of ichor, the vital fluid of the Olympians, mingled with royal human blood. He had not seen her many times when his mind was quite made up, and preluding sweetly on his lyre, so sweetly that Niobe and her maidens stopped to listen, he sung—

“ Daughter of Tantalus,
Over the sea,
Ploughing its wet paths,
Come I to thee,

Fairest of fair maids,
 Wisest of wise,
 Here on the minstrel
 Turn thy sweet eyes !

" I am Amphion,
 Jove is my sire ;
 Hast thou not heard of me—
 Heard of my lyre ?
 How the trees follow'd, each
 Bowing his head,
 And how the ancient hills
 Came where I led,

" Till a fair city
 Stood on the plain :
 Turret and battlement,
 Palace and fane,
 Fashion'd by line and rule,
 Beams fitting close,
 Pillars of marble
 In beauty arose !

" Now, alas ! Eros,
 With bitter sweet shaft
 Piercing my liver,
 Deadens my craft.
 Deeds of the hero
 I care not to sing ;
 Another must look to
 The works of the king.

" Come with me, Niobe,
 Come in thy truth,
 Be to Amphion
 The wife of his youth ;

" Ruling his household,
Honour'd and wise ;
Come with thy beauty
To gladden his eyes !"

Now, when Tantalus, the king, knew that it was Amphion of Thebes, of whom all men talked, that was dwelling in the lowly guise of a shepherd in his pastures, and that it was for love of Niobe that he had left his royal state, he was mightily pleased ; and, a hero himself, he delighted to behold the man who, though he could tame the passions of men and lead nature herself at his will, yet had not shrunk from avenging terribly on the treacherous Dircé the wrongs of the unhappy Antiope, his mother, and he gladly welcomed him, and made no secret of his great joy at finding in him a son-in-law. So Amphion went home again that he might come and fetch his bride in state, which he shortly did, sailing over the blue Ægean in a swift galley with shining sails, Zethus, the strong hunter, his brother, and many gallant kinsmen bearing him company : and never on summer seas sailed a more jocund crew than that which rowed back the swan-like galley to Aulis, when Niobe the queen sat with her women in the stern, while Amphion's lyre held the Tritons and the sea-nymphs, and the very monsters of the deep, in rapt delight.

Happily sped the years ; the fair Boeotian land was like a thriving garden ; corn lands and pastures lay in rich beauty about the queenly city, and Amphion and

Niobe exulted in their fair domain, in their people, but, above all, in the sons and daughters who were the crowning glory of their lives. So strong and handsome the sons, so fair and skilful the daughters! Who has not heard of them? So many that the mother in her pride boasted that she could count by their names the months of the year. Alas! alas! that some timely sorrow had chastened her pride, and brought to her remembrance in time the vanity of all things human. In vain the wise daughter of Teiresias, Manto the prophetess, uttered her warnings; forebodings of evil darkened her soul with shadows of coming woe. Day by day she urged upon the queen to offer timely sacrifice to Latona, the great Titaness, who, having endured untold woe in her wanderings before the birth of the twin deities Phoebus-Apollo and Artemis, was now with them exalted to the highest place of honour and of glory among the Olympians. Day and night did the streets of the city ring with her warning cry:—

“ Daughters of Ismenus, gather
Frequent to Latona's shrine,
Honour pay her and her children,
Bringing frankincense and wine;
Bind your wavy locks with laurel,
Don your festive garb to-day;
By my mouth the godheads call you,
Hearken to them and obey!”

But the queen set her face as flint against the new deity; she would worship none but Hera, the Goddess of Marriage and of Motherhood, and when at length

the voice of the prophetess had stirred the women, and high and low gathered with her to the shrine where, by the order of Amphion, the statue of Latona was placed between those of her twin children, unhappy wrath took possession of the soul of Niobe, and gathering her royal robes about her, she swept through the streets, and breaking through the throng of worshippers, exclaimed—

“How is this, ye foolish women? What new divinity have ye set up? Are ye so hard bestead for aught to worship that ye must needs set up the image of an outcast—the offspring of the Titans, the very scourge of heaven and earth? What though she chanced to catch the wandering eye of Jove, think ye he cared much for her when he left her in her trouble to the chance charity of the smallest of the islands? The daughter of Teiresias is in her dotage: the king might have known that no good would come of strange religions. Nay, if ye wanted something to worship, have ye not dwelling among you the offspring of gods and heroes—is not Amphion, your king, the very son of Jove, endowed above the race of men with the divine power of song, which raised for you this fair city, and keeps you in concord, and fearless of foreign foes within the girth of your mighty seven-gated walls? Was it a man of mortal birth who made such music, think ye? But do ye honour this Latona because of her one son and her one daughter—those same twins of whom we hear so much? A

mother of two children ! If that be a claim to worship, what say ye to my seven sons and seven daughters, born and bred among yourselves, and in whom the rare blessings wherewith the Moirae² have honoured me have reached their crowning point ? Behold how lovely and how many they are ! Even should one or two fail me, I can scarce be brought down to Latona's scant two. For very shame, then, leave this miserable shrine to the prophetess and the priests, and lay aside those laurel wreaths ! ”

The women, bewildered and dismayed at the fierce words of the queen, mechanically took the garlands from their hair, and shrunk, cowed and silent, from the shrine, trembling alike at the anger of the queen and at the wrath of Latona. They wist not that the beautiful large stork which sat brooding above the pediment of the shrine was veritably the goddess Latona herself, come thither to do honour to her suppliants ; and when she heard the furious speech of the queen, and beheld the worshippers slink away to their homes, lo ! the bird rose, and stretching out her long neck to its utmost length, flapped her great wings, and flew with a sharp, whizzing sound away towards the blue Ægean and the shining Cyklades.

The day was waning, and a fresh breeze brought dreamy music from the reedy banks of the Asopus, and sweet refreshment to men and beasts, when the sons of Amphion came forth from the palace, many a noble youth bearing them company, to exercise them-

selves in the broad plain that lay between the city and the river. Bright and glossy were their curls, bound with a golden circlet or with bright fillets of wool; the light of youth was in their eyes; lips and cheeks glowed with health, and the limbs that the light robes of Tyrian purple left to view were round and supple—right royal youths, from Ismenius, whose brow already bore the stamp of thought, to Ilioneus, who was scarcely yet past childhood.

Ismenius and Sipylus came driving their chariots, and had engaged in a friendly contest of skill and swiftness, when now in mid-career Ismenius smote his hand upon his side and fell lifeless from his chariot; a sound as of a twanging bow-string rang through the air, and Sipylus, his brother, even as he pulled in his horses in dismay, lay stretched beside him on the plain. A cry of horror and dismay, which rose from all who were observing the princes and who saw them fall, startled Phaedimus and Tantalus, the next in age, who were wrestling breast to breast and knee to knee. They looked round in amazement, and even as they looked, before they could unlock their embrace, they fell together on the plain, smitten by one shaft. Alphenor, their brother, beholding this piteous sight, hurried to render them assistance, but even as he stooped to raise the beloved heads the sharp death overtook him, and he lay himself motionless beside those whom he was striving to succour. Of Niobe's boasted seven sons there now remained but Dama-

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sicthon and Ilioneus, the two youngest—the youngest and best-beloved of their mother. Must these also perish to atone for the pride of the unhappy queen? Will the virtue and the piety of Amphion—a minstrel like thyself, O Phoebus!—avail nothing?

The Delian god paused, the arrow still upon the string, and turned the eyes to which all things are visible to the palace where Niobe, surrounded by her daughters, was just hearing the tidings of the death of her elder sons. O! why was not her heart humbled, why did she not cry for mercy to the offended god-heads? Two sons are yet unharmed, and the fatal arrow is still in the hand of the Far-darter; with two sons and all her daughters, Niobe might still have cause for thanksgiving, if not for pride. But alas! the queen was wrathful, not humble, and received the tidings with defiant disbelief. The rising pity fled from the heart of Phoebus; wrath and indignation nerved his hand; the fatal arrow whizzed through the air, and the sons of Niobe were no more.

When the terrible tidings of the swift destruction of his sons came to Amphion, his spirit swooned within him.

"Wilt thou not come and behold them?" cried the messenger. "The arrow is invisible, indeed, but the wound can easily be seen in side, or breast, or heart. Wilt thou not look once more upon the faces of thy sons?"

"Do ye what is right," cried the poet-king, his white head bowed upon his hands. "I also in my

youth wrought a stern deed of vengeance for my mother, but not so stern as this—nay, not so stern as this. I cannot look upon the faces of the young men !” Then he arose and went out of the palace to a grove of myrtle and poplar, where he had often gathered his sons about him to hearken to the tales of heroes and kings, and in that deep shade the thought of his sorrow came so darkly over him that he lost all courage, and, opening the fountains of his life, sought again the boys, who had been the crown and joy of his manhood, in the Elysian fields where those whose life on earth has been darkened by undeserved misery spend sunless but happy ages in groves of changeless beauty.

Niobe, meanwhile, her haughty soul wrung by repeated woes, had stripped off her royal robes, and with long hair dishevelled, tearless eyes, and pallid cheeks, stood with her mourning daughters beside the funeral piles of sire and sons. In that evil hour the very greatness of her sorrow seemed to feed her pride. Husband and sons—and such a husband, and such sons!—the cruel Titaness had slain them all. What grief could equal her grief? And as she kissed each cold brow and gazed her last on the beautiful, still faces, the daughter of Tantalus hardened her heart and did not recognize her sin.

Artemis, the daughter of Latona, had stood beside her brother while he drew his deadly shafts ; she stood beside him now watching the kindling piles, and, above all, the angry scowl of the bereaved queen.

"Impious daughter of an impious sire," she exclaimed in wrathful indignation, "hath not thy sin yet come home to thee?" And swift as thought, she drew her silver bow from its case, strung it, and arrow after arrow sped from the string with a sharp twang that rung from heaven to earth, appalling the nations, until of the seven sisters there remained but one, and she the youngest. The queen in terror clasped her to her breast, striving to cover her with garments, arms, and body; and lifting her eyes to heaven, she groaned,—
"Spare, ye irresistible, spare this the last, the least!"

Not in vain was this late prayer. Artemis heard and spared; and of the fourteen strong and beautiful children in whom their mother had exulted, there remained to her this little one; but the sights and sounds of those cruel days frightened the blood forever from her cheeks, and she who had been ruddy as the rose and gay as the lark at morning, grew into a sad, wan woman, whom men called Chloris, and whose thoughts were ever with the dead.

Of the crushed and broken-hearted Niobe what tongue can tell? The fountains of her tears once unsealed in the supreme agony in which she wrestled for the life of Chloris refused to be closed again. Speechless and motionless she sat among the dead, weeping endless floods of tears, speaking nothing, hearing nothing.

For three days the people of Thebes were silent and motionless, struck to stone, as it were, by their cala-

mity ; but on the fourth day they gathered heart to go to the queen, to bear away the dead from her sight and to hide them in the earth.

But neither the weeping and shouting of the people nor the removal of the dead from about her, nor the clinging caresses of her little daughter, drew word or sign from Niobe. With streaming eyes lifted to heaven she wept night and day, until Hera, in compassion, wrought with Jove so that he snatched her away in a whirlwind, carried her to her own land, to Sipylus, the mountain at whose feet she had played in the happy days of her girlhood, and there turned her into stone. There, even to this day, the traveller can discern in the grey stone on the mountain side the figure of a woman weeping in eternal despair. •



ALCESTIS.

IN ancient days, when the life of men upon earth was simple, and when war and the chase were the occupation of the young, and the words of the aged were hearkened to like the oracles of the gods, there reigned in Iolchos a haughty king—Pelias, the son of Kretheus and Tyro—whose court became famous among the neighbour princes for his four fair daughters, Peisidike, Pelopeia, Hippothoe, and Alcestis. Of all the four by far the loveliest was Alcestis, for she was not only beautiful in form and face like her sisters, but so sweet a soul dwelt in her that her natural beauty was made ten times greater by the light that streamed forth from within. The king, Pelias, loved all his daughters, but to Alcestis, the youngest, his heart clung with the tenderest affection, for she was the crown and comfort of his age, abundant in love and tender care for him ; so that Pelias, unable to bear the thought of parting with her, declared that he would give her in marriage to no one who did not

come to claim her in a chariot drawn by boars and lions.

Lovely as Alcestis was, this haughty mandate had the effect of keeping many a gallant chief away, for who was so wise or so strong as to tame the lion and make him run obedient to the rein as a yoke fellow to the tusked boar? But there was one who had gazed upon Alcestis until the thought of her was present to him night and day, and to want her seemed as bad as to want the light and air of heaven, Admetus, the son of Phereus, King of Pherae, who had stood by Meleager when he smote the Kalydonian boar, and had sailed with Jason into the Black Euxine in search of the golden fleece; but now he cared no longer for the chase or travel, all he wished for was to rest in his father's house and rule his people, if only he could win Alcestis to be his wife. Day and night the thought of her troubled him, so that his sleep departed from him, and all the business and pleasure of his life seemed unprofitable and dull.

"O thou Far-darter," he prayed, stretching out his hands to the sun-god, when his first beams smote the earth, "thou who hast thyself sorrowed for thy lost Daphne, thou who sendest hope and joy to men, be thou my helper, and teach me how to obey the mandate of the haughty king, or thyself take away this life which is bitter to me!"

Thus he prayed in his chamber when there was none but Phoebus to hearken; thus he prayed at midday

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aloud in the temple, amid the savour of burnt sacrifices, and the son of Latona heard him as he sat in the groves of his beloved Cynthus—heard him and pitied him. And he taught him how to win the noble nature of the lion to accept the guidance of his hand, and gave him a subtle charm to tame the fierce anger of the boar, so that the two princes of the forest submitted to be yoked to the polished chariot, and bore the son of Pheres on his happy journey through the flowery Thessalian land, obedient to his word and hand as well trained horses. *

King Pelias was much amazed to be informed that a suitor had come to seek the princess Alcestis, driving in his chariot a lion and a boar; but when he came forth and beheld the brave Admetus, a neighbour prince and an honoured friend, he was well content, and, dearly as he loved Alcestis, he gave her with a good grace to the wooer, who had proved his courage and his skill, and, what was better yet in the eyes of a loving father, whom the gods who live for ever honoured with their counsel and help.

The nuptials were celebrated with joy and feasting, and Pelias bade adieu to his beloved child whom he was never to behold again; for before a year was over the happiness of Admetus and Alcestis was broken by the terrible news that Medeia, the dark-browed wife whom Jason had brought home from Kolchis, having by her magic restored youth to Aeson, the father of Jason, had been entreated by the daughters of Pelias

to bestow the same boon upon their father; but the cruel woman, having made the credulous girls slay their father, with a view to raising him again in all his youthful vigour, forsook them, and, mocking their agony, left them to weep in vain over the mangled corpse.

This bitter sorrow was for many years the only trouble that darkened the life of Alcestis; in all else she was blessed beyond the common lot of women. Admetus loved her as a husband, and he trusted her as a friend. Two happy, healthy children were the crown of their wedded lives, and in house and field all went well with them.

Now there came to Pherae a stranger, noble in face and bearing, but clad like a poor countryman, who begged of Admetus to give him shelter and employment among his flocks and herds for a season, during which a stern fate compelled him to live an exile from his home. Admetus was too noble to ask him any question, he knew that some calamity was the cause—some homicide, perhaps—for in those stormy days, when weapons were for ever in the hands of men, it was no strange thing for the life of a hero to be darkened by the slaughter of a friend or kinsman in sudden anger or even by mischance, and he would fain have made much of the stranger, and kept him in his own palace and at his own table; but he chose rather to dwell in the fields among the quiet cattle, and to hide the sorrow that was darkening his life from

the eyes of men. Then all things prospered more than ever at Pherae, and such a splendid race of horses grew up in the royal pastures that men began to wonder at the strange shepherd, and to whisper to each other that never man nor hero had such creative power as to make out of common horses creatures so divine that, but for the lack of wings, they might have matched with Pegasus himself, and that the strains of music that came from the fields where the shepherd dwelt were sweeter and purer than any music which mortal bard could make.

The strange shepherd was in good sooth no other than the mighty Phoebus himself, banished from Olympus for seven long years because he had slain the Cyklops who had forged the thunderbolt with which Jove had slain his dear son, Aesculapius; but although he went in and out among men in the guise of a servant, he had not ceased to commune with the heavenly beings. His brother, Hermes, especially—perhaps not without the will of Jove—came to him often as he sat among the sheep in the Thessalian valleys, and through him it came to the knowledge of Phoebus that a calamity overhung the house of Admetus, which even he could not turn aside. The Moirae in their dark counsels had decreed the death of the King himself, the day, the very hour was appointed, and he must quit wife and house and lands for the sunless regions of the dead.

Then was Phoebus very sorrowful—as sorrowful

as the immortals who know the present, the past, and the future can be—and he sought the Moirae in their sanctuary at Thebes, and there, with all his divine eloquence, he plied them that he might wrest from them deliverance for Admetus—at least, as long as he himself should sojourn upon earth. But the Moirae were stern; what had once passed their lips could not be recalled. Only this much did the power of the sun-god wring from them: that if another head from the house of Admetus—a head as royal as his—were yielded to Thanatos¹ instead of his, the span of his life might be lengthened. With this favour Phoebus was fain at length to return, nor did the condition seem very hard to him, for in the house of Admetus still dwelt Pheres and Periklymene, father and mother of the king, old folk worn with age and weakness, who often seemed wearying for the Lethe stream, and who would surely vie with each other as to which should pass into the house of Hades for the sake of their son. But Phoebus, wise and all-seeing though he was, knew not yet how dull and timorous old age is, and the proposal, though made with all the god's wisdom, sounded harsh and cruel to the old folk. "I have yielded to my son the sceptre of my fathers, ever imperishable," said Pheres, impatiently tapping the earth with his staff; "I have endowed him in my lifetime with cities and treasures—is it not enough? Does he grudge me the few days I have to live?"

"I risked my life for him once," cried Periklymene,

weeping; "nor did I grudge, as mothers often do who wear a queenly crown, to nourish him, a helpless infant, at my breast. Have I not loved him enough? How can he ask me, weak and ill as I am, to bear more pain for him? I must have a little peace before I die. Alas! who knows what he shall meet in the dusky house of Hades?"

And the old people, in their displeasure, failed not to murmur to the queen Alcestis at the strange shepherd and at his unreasonable talk. They wist not that it was Phoebus, the mighty sun-god, who was dwelling with them in a lowly disguise. When Alcestis at length understood, amid their complaints, that great and sudden evil was said to threaten her husband, her heart was consumed with anxiety. She hastened to seek the shepherd, and she found him under a laurel shade, crooning softly to himself a hymn to one beloved and dead. It was, indeed, to the spirit of his dear son, the hero Aesculapius, but this the queen knew not; only as she drew near, the tender grief of the singer, and the sweet, soft strains of the lyre caused her to stop and, full of trouble as she was, to hearken and to shed tears for a grief that was not her own. And so she stood silent and awe-struck, what was divine in her soul causing her to recognize the divinity in the poorly-clad shepherd, until Phoebus saw her, and, ceasing from his song, he rose up and stood humbly before her, as it becomes a shepherd to stand before an honoured queen.

"O wondrous stranger!" said Alcestis—"for I dare not call thee shepherd, though now thou dwellest for a while in the pastures of Admetus—what are these strange tidings that have troubled the minds of Pheres and Periklymene? Is it indeed divine truth that the life of the noble Admetus is in danger, and that he, young and gracious as he is, is threatened with destruction? Speak, friend, for I know that the days of thy prince are precious in thine eyes, and that thou wilt tell no idle tale to fright us."

"Alas! madam, it is true."

"And is there no escape, no possibility of delay?"

• "None, for neither father nor mother will die for him."

"If Pheres or Periklymene would have entered the house of Hades in his stead, might Admetus have lived?"

"Ay, madam; so much did Phoebus, who cares for Admetus, obtain from the Moirae."

"Blessed be he of the silver bow!" exclaimed the queen. "Never shall his shrine want for garlands, or his altar for burnt sacrifice! But if the Moirae would have taken the life of the aged Pheres or the feeble Periklymene for that of the blameless Admetus, the evil cannot be past cure. I will die for him, and it cannot be but that Thanatos will receive my life instead of that of the poor old folk who are ready to drop like ripe grain into his hands."

At these words of the queen a divine beauty shone

like a halo from the face of the disguised god, but he controlled himself.

"Hast thou well considered what it is that thou proposest to thyself?" he said. "Thou art still young and fair, a mother of dear children; how wilt thou endure to pass from the warmth of life and love into the sunless tracts of those below?"

"This house would be cold and sunless to me if Admetus were away; besides, it is the bounden duty of the wife to suffer all things for her husband."

"But to leave thy dear children to the will of an unjust stepmother?"

A sadness passed across the brow of Alcestis at these words of the god tempting her; but it was like the shadow of a summer cloud thrown on a great corn-field, which passes swiftly, leaving the golden grain brighter than before.

"Admetus will care for the children," she said, "and if he give them a stepmother, the gods will put it into her heart to be gentle to them for the sake of my act; but be that as it may, but for Admetus, the children would never have lain in my bosom. It would be hard, indeed, if they should be a hindrance to his safety."

"Noble art thou among women!" exclaimed the approving god. "Do what is in thine heart, and be a blessed name among the nations, even to the islands of the furthest west."

When Admetus learnt, as he did from Phoebus

himself, how his wife had chosen to give her life for his, he would gladly have borne the fate appointed for him by the Moirae, and have died at the due time ; but the will of the goddesses and the love of Alcestis overbore all opposition, and with tortured heart he awaited the fatal day.

At length it dawned, and Phoebus himself shrunk away into the glades of Pelion at the presence of the dusky Thanatos, who came duly to claim his prize. A mortal weakness seized the failing queen ; her spirit, obedient to the summons, followed the irresistible king, and her sweet body lay silent and cold in the arms of her weeping women.

Hardly was the parting agony over, while the funeral rites were preparing, lo ! there came to the palace gates a traveller in sore need of food and rest, and according to the pious custom of those ancient days the need of the wayfarer was attended to before all else. Had he come at another time, how welcome would this traveller have been ; for it was no other than the mighty Herakles on his way to Thrace, whither he had been sent by his tyrant Eurystheus to fetch the fire-breathing horses of Diomedes. Even as it was, in such honour did Admetus hold the hero, that he bade his attendants suspend their lamentations, and conduct the preparations for the funeral in a part of the palace where no sounds of woe would reach the great hall where the feast for the guest would be spread, and himself, with feigned cheerfulness, went to

greet his friend. The kindly hero, however, was at once struck by the fact that Admetus had his hair clipped short in the fashion of a mourner, and he asked the reason.

Admetus replied that there was a funeral that day, which he would be obliged to attend.

“The gods forbid,” cried Herakles, anxiously, “that any evil may have befallen either of thy children?”

“My children,” returned Admetus, “both live and are well.”

“If thou mournest for thy father,” questioned Herakles again, “he must be now well on in years.”

“My father and my mother are both alive, Herakles.”

“It cannot be Alcestis, thy wife?” exclaimed the hero in dismay.

Then Admetus put great force upon himself; for he knew how Herakles honoured the noble Alcestis, and that if he knew what the sorrow was that brooded over his house, he would, weary as he was, trudge onward, with spent strength and sorrowing heart, rather than give any trouble in the house, bereaved of its mistress. So he said that the dead was indeed a woman—a foreign woman—one who had dwelt long under his roof, and very dear to them all. Then Herakles would have gone onward to seek hospitality elsewhere, but this Admetus would not hear of. He conducted him into the great hall, and charging his steward and his

principal attendants to supply him with all he could desire, himself withdrew for awhile to direct the funeral rites and give way to his natural sorrow.

Herakles had fasted long and travelled far, and sweet was the rest, and the bowl of warm water for his feet, and the tender hands of the careful old woman who chafed and dried them; but most sweet the steaming flesh of sheep and oxen, and the fine white bread, and the honey-sweet wine which crowned his bowl. Royally the lusty hero ate and drank, but there was one hindrance to his comfort, which pressed upon him more as his hunger and thirst began to be appeased. Though Admetus had charged his people on no account to let Herakles see that they were in trouble, they were not able to control altogether their grief, and, indeed, were not a little concerned at what seemed to them want of proper respect to their dear mistress, whose gracious kindness had made their lives pleasant to them, and many a time and oft had turned aside their master's wrath. Now Herakles feared not man nor beast. He could slay a hydra or face a fire-breathing horse, but he could not endure a clouded countenance or a dull, unsympathetic manner, and considering the steward's grief out of bounds for an event so common as death—the death of a slave, however faithful and however honoured—he bade him quaff a goblet of wine to rouse his dull spirits, and to crown his head with a chaplet of fresh leaves. "For," added he, cheerily, "wist thou not that we are all to

die? Is it not common sense, then, to accept death with a good courage? If a man indulges in gloom and melancholy, life is not life, but a calamity."

"I know that right well," replied the steward, the tears standing in his eyes; "but it is not in the power of all the laughter and jollity in the world to drown the memory of the grief which now compasseth us about."

"A woman of a strange land is dead—so much the worse for her; but when your king and his house are well——"

"Our king and his house!" exclaimed the steward. "Alas! sir, you know not the grief under which we groan."

"Can it be that your lord has deceived me?" cried Herakles, in alarm.

"Admetus holds the rites of hospitality in such honour that he would sacrifice everything to them. It is, indeed, a woman of a strange country who is dead, but no slave, alas!"

"Could it be," said Herakles, "that Admetus was really in bitter grief himself, yet hid it from me?"

"Yes, for he would not sadden thee. But seest thou not how our heads are shaven, and what black robes we wear? No common grief, no servile mourning this."

"Who, then, is dead?" impatiently exclaimed the hero.

"The wife of Admetus, guest-friend!" cried the steward; and he hid his face in his mantle, unable longer to control his tears.

"And yet ye received me and made me a feast?"

"Yes, for it was his will; he honours Zeus Zenius^s too much to thrust thee away."

"Poor prince! What a wife to lose!"

"Ay, sir, we are all undone; she was the light and comfort of the house."

"I saw," said Herakles, "that as he spoke to me his eyes were full of tears—I saw his mourning garments and his shaven head; but I believed what he told me of a foreign woman who was to be buried—a foreign woman indeed was the matchless Alcestis, but who so near and dear? A voice within me warned me that I should turn aside from the house, but I would not hearken to it. To think that I should have drunk and feasted in the house of a man so overwhelmed with sorrow! Tell me, man, tell me where he has buried her, that I too may mourn over her."

Then the steward's tongue was loosened and he told to Herakles the whole story of the fate that had threatened Admetus, and how the Moirae had been won to accept another life, as noble, instead of his, and how Alcestis, gaining knowledge of this, had given her own life for his: "as noble a life," said the weeping steward, "as ever was lived upon this earth." Herakles listened without a word to all the story, moved to the bottom of his great soul at the virtue of Alcestis, and stung with shame at his own dulness in not searching more deeply into the source of the sorrow in the house, and there entered into his heart.

a wonderful resolution, even to enter once more the realms of Hades, whence he had already dragged the three-headed Cerberus for Eurystheus to see, and to wrest the newly-flown spirit from the grasp of Thanatos. Such seemed to him the only fit compensation he could make to her or to Admetus for breaking in upon them in their sorrow. So without more delay he hastened to the tomb—now richly spread with honey-cakes, and silent—and lay in wait until, as he expected, Thanatos came to regale himself on the offerings ; then he rushed out upon him, and grasping him in his arms would by no means let him go until he promised to bring back the queen alive to the earth. "

Admetus meanwhile was so overwhelmed with sorrow that he could not gather courage to return to his widowed home : the tender memories of his wedded life came back to him, and in his loneliness he envied her who was dead, thinking that he would gladly have leapt into the pit where her body was laid, and been covered up with her out of the sight of men.

While he still lingered outside the palace, he was surprised to behold the guest, whom he believed to be resting safely in his guest-chamber, approach him leading by the hand a veiled woman. Herakles at once and frankly reproached him for leaving him in ignorance of so momentous a truth as the death of his wife, since between friends all speech should be free and open ; but he said that though he had just cause of complaint against him, he would not add to his sorrow,

but would show him the trust he still placed in his friendship by giving into his charge a lady, the captive of his spear, whom he had much reason to honour dearly. "Do thou, Admētus," he said, "take her under thy roof, while I go to this fierce Thracian, whose horses I must needs have ; and well I wot that he will not give them to me without a struggle, in which either he or I must fall. Should he be the conqueror—which the gods avert !—I make thee a present of this fair prize, won not without strain of nerve and sinew ! Let her dwell in thine house for my sake."

"Noble Herakles," replied Admetus, "forgive me that I hid my grief from thee. How could I let thee, wayworn and weary as thou wert, toil onward in search of food and rest, and so lose to my poor house the honour of sheltering once more the first of heroes ? But as to this lady, I beg thee seek entertainment for her elsewhere ; there are many in Pherae who would gladly pay her all honour, to be accounted thy guest-friend. As for me, the sight of a lady about the house would move me to endless weeping, my trouble is new and heavy upon me. Your prize is young and fair—one can see that even under her veil—she would need some kindly woman to care for and to guide her. Alas ! even now she reminds me of her who is dead. For the sake of all the gods, noble Herakles, take her from my sight. When I look at her my heart leaps and the fountains of my tears are broken up ; for even so did Alcestis stand, so did she move !"

"Would that Jove would give thee back thy wife, poor friend!" said Herakles.

"A vain wish, noble son of Alkmene, seeing that the dead return not to dwell in their earthly homes."

Then Herakles strove to cheer him, telling him that the time would come when the thought of second nuptials would not be painful to him; at mention of which the soul of Admetus flamed out in anger. Then Herakles again pressed him to take the strange lady into his house, and Admetus was at length persuaded to take her by the hand to conduct her into the palace, that she might abide there until he should return to reclaim her. "But," said the son of Alkmene, "before thou dost lead her in, draw aside her veil, and behold if this stranger resemble not thine own wife in feature and in complexion, as well as in height and gait, and if great and abundant joy be not prepared for thee instead of overwhelming grief."

Scarce comprehending the words of Herakles, Admetus with a trembling hand drew aside the veil that hid the countenance of the stranger, and beheld, O miracle! the true face of his beloved wife, pale indeed, but smiling on him with incomparable love. Who can tell the joy of that hour when the dear wife and mother was given back in a manner so unlooked for, and the house of mourning was turned into a house of joy?

For three days—such test the infernal gods required—Alcestis uttered no sound; but when the rites to

Proserpina were duly paid and the lustral sacrifices offered, she was again the tender wife and mother, the gracious queen and mistress, full of thought and care for all, from the royal Admetus to the poor slave who swept the chambers. Honour first to Him of the silver bow, the ever-present honour and protection of the house, honour and love to the much-enduring Herakles, and safe end to his hard labours !

Alceestis beheld her children, Eumelus and Perimele, grow up under her kindly care to be a noble man and woman ; and when at length she passed away, full of years, her passage to the realms of Hades was swift and easy as the sleep of the wayfarer weary with long travel.



ATALANTA.

BEAR away the infant from my sight! I want no weeping girls. When thou bringest me a sturdy boy I will give thee thy freedom and much treasure beside, so that thou shalt be an object of envy to all thy gossips."

It was Iasius of Arcadia who spake to Eriphyle, the prudent nurse of Klymene, his wife, who brought him the little daughter just born to him.

"Alas!" cried the nurse, trembling, "and what is to become of this sweet innocent? Wilt thou not at least look at her? She is the very image of thyself!"

But Iasius was sore disappointed. He had made up his mind to have a son who should stand by him in the field and in the council, and having no knowledge of how weak a thing a little infant is at the best, the glance he cast at the little face which Eriphyle held up to him only made him more angry. He would not have such a feeble creature grow up to call him father; so he hastily called Eurubates, his trusty

attendant, who had many a time executed an evil command at his bidding, and he told him to take the child and carry it to some lonely spot on the hills, where cold and hunger would quickly make an end of it. Perhaps if he had once taken the little maid in his arms, the tender, fatherly love which the gods have placed in the hearts of all men might have been awakened in him; but the Moirae had willed it otherwise, who had ordained that this feeble nursling should become a name for strength and beauty among the nations.

Eriphyle, the nurse, returned weeping to the queen, who, robbed of her sweet babe, had much ado to rally from her weakness, and Eurubates carried the little maid to a cave which he knew on the side of a hill, and there laid her softly within its shadow and turned and went quickly away, never daring to look behind him; and at his dying day, when the many evil deeds of his life rose before him, the vision of that royal robe, within the folds of which he had never looked, troubled him more than grosser deeds of violence and blood-shedding to which he had lent a hand.

But the acts of men are not unheeded by the gods, and Artemis, the maiden goddess, had compassion on the little forsaken child, and sent a she-bear to the cavern of Mount Parthenius, or the Maiden Hill, as it came to be called in later times, and the wild beast became a nursing-mother to the infant, and warmed her with her shaggy coat, and nourished her with her

rich milk, so that she grew into a sturdy child, clinging to the long hair of her foster-mother, or trotting on all fours by her side; and haply she might have grown up with more of brutal than human in her temper and manners, had not Artemis taken her away and given her to her own attendant Orythieia, to rear and to teach all the arts that become a huntress, especially the shooting with the bow and swiftness of foot.

Under the fostering care of Orythieia, the little Atalanta (it was thus that Artemis had named the maiden) learned to know the haunts and habits of all woodland creatures, from the wild boar who makes his lair in the hill-side, a terror to men, to the little field-mice that have their homes in the mossy bank where the violets grow; every creature that had beauty of form or colour was her playfellow—she outran the roe, and leapt from crag to crag as strong and nimble as the wild goat; every bird that piped upon a spray seemed to speak to Atalanta's ear, and many a time and oft her arrow or her spear saved some tender creature of earth or air, some brooding dove or mother deer from talon of vulture or ravening tooth of lynx or lion.

And so the maiden grew in strength and beauty, and in the favour of the great goddess, who perfected her, as she well deserved, in all the arts of the huntress, and in that secret lore, the fruit of watchful observation, in which the open-eyed children of Latona are so abundantly skilled; but it pleased Artemis that she,

who was so richly endowed with special gifts, should live a chaste, unworldly life, and leaving marriage and motherhood to the ordinary daughters of men, should spend the years of her mortal life in high-communing with nature. In early youth this seemed to Atalanta not a loss, but a gain; having the whole world of earth and air to claim kindred with, what did it concern her that men and women alone were strangers to her? And she grew so perfect and so wise, that Artemis found it in her heart to grieve at her mortal parentage, and to desire that she also might be one of the deathless ones.

•When Atalanta was now some seventeen summers old, a cry of lamentation rung through the Achæan land from the pleasant fields of Aetolia. A mighty monster of a boar, sent by some angry deity (Artemis herself, it was whispered) had made his lair close to rocky Kalydon, and neither man nor dog was able to dislodge him. In vain the vine-dressers dressed the vineyards, in vain the husbandmen sowed the corn; no sooner was the gracious earth ripening her fruits, than the brute sallied forth, rooting up the tender shoots with his tusks, and treading the grapes and corn alike in the dust, and vine-dresser and husbandman were torn to pieces if they attempted to guard their labours: and so sore was the distress, and so lusty grew the boar, that the noble Oeneus, king of Kalydon, was weary of his life, for the constant wail of the husbandmen, of their widows and orphaned

children, and for the havoc wrought by that evil beast. Then he took counsel with his son, the bright-haired Meleager, and they proclaimed a great hunt throughout all the Achaean land, from Hellas famed for lovely women, to pleasant Lacedaemon, lying in a hollow. And all the Achaean land hearkened, and sent forth her brave young spirits to aid the suffering Aetolia, and to rid the earth of that evil beast. And from Arkadia came the maiden Atalanta, bearing her boarspears in her hand, and on her shoulders the skin of a spotted panther: and Oeneus and Meleager greeted her courteously, for they knew that Artemis herself had taught her woodcraft; but some of the chieftains were angry, and took it ill that a girl should be thought worthy to join with men in the chase; and especially Plexippus, the uncle of Meleager, was full of angry scorn.

"Bring to us the distaff and the lute," he cried, contemptuously, "if the boar-spear and the bow are come to be the tools of women. Nay, nephew, for shame! take the damsel to the upper chamber, where Kleopatra thy honoured wife, sits spinning among her maidens; there she will find fit companions and worthy occupation. Surely it becomes a maiden to weave garments for heroes, rather than to waste her feeble powers in the battle or the chase."

"Hist! uncle; speak not so unwisely!" replied Meleager, angrily. "Wist ye not that the great goddesses, Athena and Artemis, delight in the battle and

the chase? Oeneus hath invited all skilled hunters to aid us in this our strait, and may Zeus Zenius bring evil on my head, if I fail in my duty as a guest-friend to this damsel who has come in answer to our summons, and whom Artemis herself has instructed in the art of hurling the spear, and in all things that pertain to the slaying of wild beasts."

Then all the other chieftains frankly gave in, and bade the damsel welcome; only Plexippus remained dark and angry, waiting an occasion to show his wrath.

It was a gallant band of hunters that went out to slay the Kalydonian boar, for there were the twin princes Kastor and Pollux, Jason of Pherae, Peleus of Thessaly, and many more of whom the old world was justly proud; but among them all Atalanta stood pre-eminent by her skill and by her beauty, and it was her spear that first drew blood by a well-aimed blow which smote the boar in the mouth; her Meleager quickly followed, striking the huge brute to the heart, and hero followed hero until spears stood thick on his back and shoulders, and the creature rolled on the plain, pouring out his life from a hundred wounds, and fertilizing with his blood the ground he had wasted.

Then Meleager drew his sword, and cutting off the head, presented it as the first fruits of victory to Atalanta, but Plexippus rudely snatched it from her, declaring that it was a prize for a king, and should be

given to no one but to Oeneus of Kalydon, whose of right it was.

Then the wrath of Meleager flamed up, and he smote Plexippus on the temple with his doubled fist, and the man fell as falls an ox in the shambles when the butcher smites him, and the giddy blood gushed from mouth and nostrils. Consternation seized all the chieftains, none more than Atalanta, the innocent cause of the calamity, and Meleager stood aghast over his fallen kinsman. In vain the gracious twins lifted his head and strove to see if there were any breath of life in him; in vain Nestor of Pylos, the youngest man there, ran to seek a leech; the soul had passed the ivory portals of his teeth, and Plexippus would never utter a threat or insult more.

Meantime, tidings that the boar was slain had reached the city, and Althaea, the queen, was coming forth with her women bearing garlands, to do honour with dancing and with song to the victors, when, as she stood on the threshold of the gate, one came flying, white and horror-stricken, and told how the prince Plexippus was slain.

"Ah! woe is me!" exclaimed the queen; "how slain? I heard the boar was dead, but wist not that he had given my brother his death wound."

"Alas! lady, it was not by the boar that the noble Plexippus was slain, it was Prince Meleager who wished to give the first fruits of the victory to the strange Arkadian huntress, but Plexippus would not

have it, and Meleager was wrathful and smote him, so that he died."

"My son slew my brother for the sake of the foreign woman!" shrieked the queen. "But Plexippus shall not die unavenged; the soul of my mother's son shall be appeased!"

And scarce knowing what she did, Althaea rushed to the chamber where her choice treasure was laid up, and turning the key in the great cedar chest, where many rich garments and costly ornaments were stored, she snatched from beneath them a billet of wood and flung it on the fire that was burning on the hearth.

Strange treasure to be laid up among gold and silver and needlework—a billet of fir-wood about the size of a child's body, black with age and charred, as though it had been already in the fire!

The merry flames leapt up and kissed the black brand, which lay for a few minutes dull and still among them; but the fire was bright and strong, and soon the outer bark cracked and glowed, and then the whole mass grew ruddy like a bar of iron in a smith's forge, and the jocund flames leapt higher, with many a fountain of sparks; then the billet began to whiten and to smoulder, and flakes of grey ash dropped off, and it grew smaller and smaller, passing away in light atoms; and all the while the Queen Althaea stood gazing at it, her white face set like a flint and her tremulous hands clasped tight together; for well she knew what the burning of that firebrand meant—well

she remembered that when her little Meleager was newly laid in her bosom, and the mother's joy was fresh in her heart, there came floating into her chamber three weird women. The nurse who sat by the hearth thought it was but a wreath of smoke blown by the wind across the chamber, but Althaea knew them to be the dread Moirae, the sisters who order the lives of men. They hung about the bed while one might count a score, waving with their hands in mystic gestures over the new-born child; then she who seemed the oldest snatched a firebrand from the hearth, and flinging it into the flames, exclaimed—

“Brave and lovely shall the child be, and as long as yon firebrand remains unconsumed, so long shall be his life upon earth!”

The Moirae vanished, and Althaea leapt from her bed and snatching the burning brand from the hearth quenched the flame and hid it beneath her pillows, and had ever kept it as her chiefest treasure and as the safeguard of Meleager's life.

What sound is yon of slowly-tramping feet, of stifled sobs—what burden are these stout men of Kalydon and these guest-friends bearing into the great hall of Oeneus? Althaea turned to look. What shrunken form is yon, with yellow locks hanging and feeble hands dragging on the ground? Can this be her Meleager, the pride of Aetolia, her bright-haired son? A shriek that pierced to the halls of the Olympians rang through the palace; it was he, and her hand had slain him.

Alas, alas ! what were fifty brothers to one such son ? In vain she plunged her hands into the flames to grasp what yet remained of the brand, the white ashes crumbled at her touch, and with a groan, like that of a parting spirit, she rushed to hide her horror in darkness and in solitude.

So perished the noble Meleager, undone by the rash act of his mother, and the gallant troop of hunters who had gathered so lightly at the call of Oeneus broke up silently and sadly when the funeral rites were ended and the lofty barrow piled ; and most solitary, most sad, went Atalanta, she who had been the innocent cause of Meleager's death. But the fame of her beauty and her matchless skill was spread abroad through all the Achæan land, by the heroes who had seen her in Kalydon ; and Iasius, her father, who was now growing into years, and had no child, neither son nor daughter, save the little maid who had been laid in the cave of Mount Parthenius, became ten times more anxious to recover her than he had been to destroy her feeble life, and learning from the shepherds the wondrous tale of her preservation by the she-bear, and of her life afterwards, he sent with much ado to fetch her from the hill-side where she was wont to dwell, and besought her to come home to his palace, to live with him as his beloved daughter, and when he should die to rule the Arkadians after him.

But Atalanta would not hearken to the messengers.

" If Iasius be indeed my father," she said, " I owe

him no filial duty ; when I needed care and tenderness he spurned me from his hearth ; now that he has no longer hope of a son, and that Artemis hath made me famous, he would have me home. Tell him, that the home he decreed for me, when an infant, pleases me better now than palace of bronze or roof of cedar-wood."

Then Iasius came himself and entreated her, and the heart of Atalanta smote her at the sight of his white hair and his tearful eyes ; it was not right, she felt, for a father to be a suppliant to his own daughter ; so she went, sorely against her will, from the woodland to dwell in the city, and learn the manners and the ways of men. When it was known that King Iasius had a fair daughter dwelling in his palace, who should inherit his wealth and all his lands, and who besides was the famous huntress Atalanta, wooers, many and noble, from all parts of the Achæan land came to seek her in marriage ; but Atalanta remembered the lessons of Orythieia, that she who is beloved by Artemis must have nothing to do with love and marriage, and Iasius, though he was proud to see so many noble chieftains hanging about his palace gates, was by no means disposed to let his daughter go ; but because she was wondrously swift, and he loved to see her run, he caused a proclamation to be made, that Atalanta should become the wife of him who should outstrip her in the race, but that if she should outrun him he should yield himself vanquished, and should perish

beneath the axe. To many this proclamation seemed too haughty, but there were not wanting youths who thought the maiden worth the seeking even at this price, and Atalanta came to dread the sound of the herald's trumpet, which proclaimed the coming of a new suitor, from whose presence she could only be delivered by the alternative of his death.

On a summer day there came to Atalanta the tidings that a fresh suitor had presented himself, and the warning to hold herself in readiness to run at the appointed hour. It was a slim, fair-haired youth, swift enough among his comrades, but who had no chance with the wind-footed Atalanta; but when he was led away to his death, there stood forward one who had borne him company, who looking Iasius straight in the eyes, spoke as follows:—

"I also, King Iasius, claim the right to run in the race with the Princess Atalanta. I am called Meilanion, the son of Amphidamas, and my father owns hills and valleys near to thine."

"I know the noble Amphidamas well," said Iasius, eyeing the stranger keenly; "he and I are guest-friends. Come thou home with me to my palace and taste of the banquet and of the brimming goblet; it were better thus, than that thou shouldst risk thy life in running with Atalanta."

"Nay, not so, O king. When I came hither, I confess that I thought thy proclamation harsh and unworthy of a free-born Achaean king, but now that I have be-

held the noble Atalanta, and seen her run, so help me Zeus ! I think the condition good, for indeed no one who cannot surpass her in the foot-race, is worthy to be her yokefellow, and he who has failed, having aimed at so great honour, is to be envied if he at once enter the house of Hades, for what other mortal maid could he brook to wed, having once beheld her matchless form ? ”

“ Nevertheless, death is bitter, especially to a young man,” said Iasius, pityingly. The princess said nothing, but she looked at the comely youth, and a sorrow filled her soul such as she had not felt for anyone of the chieftains who had died for her sake—such a sorrow as darkened her soul when Meleager lay dying beside the slain boar, for this was a youth bright-eyed and beautiful, broad-chested and narrow-flanked, looking as Phoebus looks when he stands in the glory of the morning on the hills of Lycia.

“ Father,” she said softly to Iasius, “ send him away ! ”

“ I would willingly indeed send him away, Atalanta, seeing it is impossible for any mortal man to contend with thee in swiftness of foot ; but if he persists I cannot refuse him his chance.” Then he turned once more to the stranger. “ Know,” he said, kindly, “ that this maiden has been trained to swiftness from her infancy ; the she-bear was her nursing-mother, the mountain nymphs who attend on Artemis, the tamer of wild beasts, were her trainers ; not Boreas himself

rushes more swiftly when he tips the crests of the waves with foam. Be advised, retire from the contest while thou art still unconquered !”

But Meilæmon would not hearken ; the look of pity in Atalanta's eyes kindled the longing more sharply in his heart, he was well content to win her or to die, and he would gladly have run the race at once ; but this Iasius would not permit, for the day was far spent and both Atalanta and her wooer stood in need of food and rest. So they went home to the palace and partook of the well-appointed banquet, and of the sweet wine, seasoning the food with much pleasant talk of men and places, and listening to the long-haired Thamyris,⁶ who was sojourning at the court of Iasius, a sweet minstrel truly, but not yet so famous or so proud of his skill as to challenge the Muses, daughters of ægis-bearing Jove !

When at length the feast was over, and Iasius and all his court were wrapt in sleep, the stranger felt no touch of weariness, all his soul was filled with the image of the princess, and kneeling, he prayed this prayer to golden Aphrodite.

“ O, thou irresistible daughter of highest Jove, who hast imbued the maiden Atalanta with a share of thine own loveliness, desert me not in this my strait : Yea, verily, I pray thee desert us not, for I think that, thanks to thee, the maiden herself would not be ill-pleased to be conquered in this race if only Artemis, rejoicing in the bow, were not displeased ! Hearken to me, golden Aphrodite, if ever I have hung thy shrine with garlands ;

so shall frankincense burn for ever at thy shrine, and garlands of fragrant flowers be daily hung about thine altars !”

And Aphrodite heard him where she sat beside the Trojan Anchises in a glade of Ida, and she laughed to think that Atalanta, the sworn attendant of her shrewish sister Artemis, had at length yielded to the arrows of her playful son ; so she poured sweet sleep upon Meilanion, and in his sleep she showed herself to him in the form of Arene, his own mother, and bade him be of good cheer, and she gave him three golden apples from the gardens of the Hesperides, bidding him throw them in the path of the maiden as she ran, who, trusting to her swiftness, would stop to pick them up, and so be easily vanquished. And it came to pass even as the goddess prophesied. Atalanta, beholding the beautiful golden fruit—such fruit as mortal eye had never before looked on—could not restrain herself, and while she stooped to pick them up, Meilanion darted on ahead, and won an easy victory. Thus Atalanta was at last vanquished, and became the wife of Meilanion, son of Amphidamas, and dwelt in the sweet Arkadian land, content to be a wife and mother, and to care for housewifery ; but one son was given to her, whom his father called Parthenopæus, a noble youth, who grew to man’s estate only to perish with Polynices, the son of the unhappy Oedipus, when the flower of the Achæan chivalry died beneath the fatal walls of Thebes.

When the tidings of the death of her son came to

Atalanta, a mighty longing for the woods and water-brooks took possession of her soul, and an unconquerable weariness of the ways of men and all the restraints of court life ; and she persuaded Meilanion to leave the cities and the haunts of men, and to go out with her alone into the wild woodland, where they could live in unrestrained freedom like the wild creatures that people it. Wherefore the poets have feigned that the gods changed them both into bears, which ever haunt the mountain glades and shun the paths of men.



ANTIGONE.

THE honoured king, the darling of his people, the saviour of the city is fallen, worse than dead, lower than slavery ! The woes he called down on the man whose crimes had brought the wrath of the gods on Thebes have lighted on his own head, for he, alas ! he, the princely Oedipus, is shown to be the homicide, the parricide—nay, worse than parricide—whose crimes have tainted the very heart of Thebes, and made her an abomination in the sight of heaven !

Little did the venturous youth think of the man who lay slain by the wayside, as you come from Pytho to Thebes, when his subtle wit solved the riddle of the Sphinx, and freed the Thebans from dismay and death. Was he worth casting a thought upon, that rude old man who had insulted him beyond endurance ? Surely not, his blood be on his own head ; Oedipus may revel in the joy he has given to the fair Boeotian land. Is there one face in all the happy town that does not brighten as it looks to him, from the stately queen to

the little child who had been frightened in its sleep with dreams of the dread monster?

The throne of Thebes was vacant, and Kreon, the queen's brother, who was regent, had made proclamation throughout the Achæan land that the widowed queen and all the sovereignty of Thebes should be given to him who should solve the riddle of the Sphinx and free the city from her presence.

The riddle of the Sphinx ran thus :—

“ What creature, in the morning walks
On four legs, and at midday stalks
Erect on two, but which you see
Creeping at sunset upon three ? ”

When the stranger came, and standing boldly in front of the winged torment, declared the answer to be “man,” and the Sphinx flung herself down in wrath from her pinnacle of rock, the riddle seemed so simple that everyone wondered how he could have failed to guess it, but not the less did they rival each other in paying honour to the stranger: and he, for his part, an adventurer in search of a home and kindred, was well content to find all he needed in this beautiful city of the plain, rich with tales of heroes, foreign and homebred. The royal heart, which cares for all men and thinks for all men, bade him take this kingless people for his people, and be a true helpmate to the childless and widowed queen. Here he might, perhaps, have chosen otherwise; but Jocasta was a gracious lady, and he would bend his heart to be to her

a noble and a worthy consort, better than him she had lost, of whom men spoke but little, and that darkly.

So the easy years sped by, and white hairs scantily mingled with the brown locks of Oedipus; four children were growing up about him, two strong-willed, venturous boys, and two sweet maidens, on whom his heart rested. Then heavy days came, when Thebes was wasted with pestilence, and the king was helpless to avert it. When the prophet declared that he was himself the pollution which weighed upon the land, and the truth was borne in upon his mind that the insolent stranger whom he had struck down at the cross-roads coming from Phocis was no other than Laius, King of Thebes, for whose unavenged death the Erinnyes were now demanding retribution, then horror was added to horror in the conviction that the king so slain, whom, as a king, he was bound to avenge, was the father to seek whom he had left Korinth and his kind foster-parents, and the unhappy Oedipus was ashamed to look longer on the faces of men. In his frenzy he destroyed the eyes in whose sweet functions he had so much delighted, and, poor as he had come into Thebes, he left it alone, but for the company of his dear daughter Antigone, who clung to him in his agony, guiding his weary steps, until at last his sorrows were hidden from the upper world and the earth opened to receive him at Kolonus, in Attica.

When Oedipus was dead, Antigone returned again

to Thebes, where her brothers, Eteokles and Polynices, now grown to man's estate, were about to assume the government. Antigone would have been well pleased if they could have been content to rule conjointly, as the Herakleidae in after ages ruled at Sparta, but this the young men were too haughty to assent to ; therefore they agreed to rule year by year in turn, and Eteokles, as the elder, was to rule his year first. Now though neither of the brothers had done anything to succour their ill-fated father, but rather blamed him for the curse on their race, yet they were not insensible to the virtue of Antigone, and they made her royally welcome, and strove with each other which should show her most honour ; and it may be that her presence in Thebes inclined them more readily to peaceful counsels, and made them think shame of merely selfish ends.

So Eteokles sat in the seat of Oedipus, and Polynices went abroad to study men and manners, and to seek adventures in the fair Achaean land.

Then for two years the life of Antigone was happy and but little troubled with care. She was as a queen in Thebes, for Ismene, her sister, readily yielded to her more royal nature, and walked by her counsel ; while every citizen, from Kreon, the aged, to the stripling who had scarcely reached manhood, honoured and loved her. At the end of the first year Polynices came joyfully home to take his year of sovereignty, sunburnt and strong from his travels.

Eteokles cheerily gave way to him, and set out in his turn to see the places and the men of which Polynices had so much to say.

All too happy, all too short were the twelve months during which Polynices was King of Thebes, all too soon arrived the appointed day when Eteokles came home again, weary with his voyaging. Happy as he was in his native town and among his kindred, Polynices duly surrendered the throne to his brother, but he waited to do honour to the betrothal of his sister Antigone to Haemon, the youngest and the noblest of the sons of Kreon; then he departed, not so willingly as before, but with good purpose of leaving the government in the hands of his brother, according to their covenant. But the second year of the reign of Eteokles wanted the grace of the first—the king was moody, sometimes almost despotic, so that men began to look with longing to the time when the spring should bring Polynices home again; and when flowers were starring the grassy plains of the Asopus, back came the gallant Polynices, eager for his home and kindred. But the curse of Oedipus was working, and the gods perverted the mind of Eteokles, so that he flatly refused to do his brother right, and strengthening himself with evil counsellors drove him not only from Thebes, but from the whole land, as though he had been a public enemy, not the brother who had grown up with him at the knees of the same parents.

Dishonoured and cheated of his rights, Polynices

set his face southward, no longer a light-hearted traveller seeking into the manners and customs of men, and eager to make himself famous by his deeds of prowess, or by his well-weighed words, but an angry man whose soul was darkened by a bitter wrong done him by the one upon earth whom of all men he had most delighted to love and honour: southward he journeyed, silent and solitary, eating where food chanced to offer itself and sleeping in a cave or by a murmuring brook, but shrinking from the homes of chieftains and the temples of the gods, or any place to which men resort: and so it came about that his weary way at last led him, when now the light was waning, and the crescent moon hung like a silver bow in the dark sky, to the courtyard of a stately palace, and perchance, though the night was coming on, he might have turned aside to avoid the eyes of men; but while he stood uncertain, there came brushing past him another man armed like himself and solitary, to whom Polynices spoke angrily, bidding him keep to his own side of the road; but the stranger answered his fierce words with words fiercer still, and words led to blows, so that these two men, who had never before looked each other in the face, and each of whom was in sore need of a friend, fell to belabouring each other with such a will that the sound of the blows pierced into the palace where the king sat at meat, and he came forth himself with his attendants to see what unmannerly strangers were quarrelling at his gates.

It was Adrastus, son of Talaus, a wise prince, in the prime of manhood : at the sound of his voice the two young men dropped their swords, and looked abashed upon the ground. Adrastus glanced from one to the other, and his wrath changed into kindly admiration, till as he perused their armour, amazement took possession of his mind.

"Tell me your names, ye noble youths," he exclaimed, "for verily I see on the shield of the one a bear, and on that of the other a lion; truly your coming hither hath been foretold by an oracle, and happy hours await you here. Be friends, then, and tell me each his name."

"I am Tydeus, of Kalydon," said the one.

"I am of Thebes, and my name is Polynices," said the other.

Then Adrastus took them both by the hands and greeted them kindly; bidding them be friends to him and to each other, seeing that they were both suffering the pains of exile through the misdeeds of others, and telling them that he could feel for them since he had himself also been a stranger in a strange land, when Amphiaraus slew his father, and he had to fly for his life ; so he bad them be of good cheer, for Phoebus Apollo himself had charged him to make ready for them, and to do his utmost to avenge them on their enemies. These kindly words of the king greatly lightened the hearts of the young men, and when they found themselves in the well-lighted hall, and

were able to see each other, they were greatly rejoiced that Adrastus had stopped a quarrel which bade fair to end in the death of one or other, and they conceived a mighty affection for each other, and from henceforth to their dying day could never see enough of each other or do enough for each other. And Adrastus for his part could not make enough of them, and, obeying the voice of the oracle, he gave to them in marriage his two daughters, and set himself to strain nerve and sinew to restore them, each to his own land.

It was glad news to Ismene and Antigone, the anxious princesses in Thebes, that their outcast brother had found favour in the sight of a prince so famous as Adrastus of Argos, and that he had received as his bride the fair young Argeia, daughter of Adrastus; but their joy was soon darkened by other tidings which followed quickly, of forging of armour, of building of chariots, of marshalling of armies and gathering of chieftains, who rose throughout the Achæan and the Apian land at the bidding of Polynices and Tydeus, who journeyed together from court to court seeking allies and winning golden opinions from all men; for they solemnly called upon every freeborn man who loved the right to aid them in returning to the homes whence they had been unjustly driven—Polynices to Thebes and Tydeus to Kalydon; and when the goodly host was gathered and solemn sacrifice made, the two warriors, Tydeus and Polynices, at the bidding of their father-in-law, flung each his lot into a whirling helmet

to see which should first be righted, and the lot of Polynices leapt forth first. Then they set forth, a gallant armament, and when they came to the grassy valley of the reedy Asopus, they halted, and taking counsel, despatched Tydeus to Thebes formally to demand the restoration of Polynices. When Tydeus came to Thebes, he found Eteokles banqueting among his nobles and boldly did his message; as he well expected, Eteokles haughtily refused to surrender the throne, and spoke of his brother as though he had been a foreign enemy invading his country, and of himself as a patriot ready to risk life and limb in her defence; whereat the noble Tydeus waxed wrathful, and though alone and a stranger, he was no way cowed by the haughty bearing of the Kadmeians, but he challenged them to try their strength with him—to wrestle, to run, or to drive the chariot, and all who offered themselves he easily overcame, so well had he profited by the lessons of Athena, his patroness. Then the men of Thebes were wrathful above measure, and fifty young men lay in wait for him as he came out of the city journeying back from his useless errand: but Tydeus, in no way dismayed, set his back against a tree and dealt about him so lustily that of all the fifty but one, Maeon, the son of Haemon, returned home to tell the tale.

Now all these things grieved the soul of Antigone, to whom honour and justice were dearer than life; but when the invading army came pouring into the plain,

where the sons of Amphion met their death on account of the haughty spirit of Niobe, their mother ; when strange helmets flashed and spears glittered among the flowers ; bitter woe and dread of evil to come cleft her heart, so that she could find no comfort, but wandered from shrine to shrine with offerings to appease the godheads, bowed in speechless supplication before them that they would avert the evil, or else she mounted the battlements and there descried by their devices the forms of the invading princes.

There she learnt to know the noble Adrastus, who in obedience to the gods had left his home in Argos to do right to Polynices, his son-in-law ; the brave Tydeus, whose sword had already drank so deeply of Theban blood ; Amphiaraus, the wise prophet, who had come much against his will on this errand ; the young Parthenopæus, the one son of the huntress Atalanta ; the impetuous Kapaneus, who had sworn that spite of Zeus himself he would scale the walls ; and Hippomedon, son of Taläus.

The ancient city of Thebes lies between the streams of Dirce and Ismarus, which flowing through deep ravines guard it on two sides ; the walls of Amphion gird it at either end with three gates at the northern, four at the southern end ; making the seven gates, which have given it its name of seven-gated Thebes.

These seven gates were at once pitched upon by the invaders as the chief points of attack, and, as it

chanced that there were seven chiefs, each chief with his powers encamped against a gate, eager to force an entrance; but the men of Thebes, the gallant Kadmeians, were no whit daunted, and Eteokles was busy night and day going from post to post, making the most of a bad cause and reminding them that the gods had promised that not in this generation should the walls of Thebes be overthrown. He stationed his bravest captains at the gates, and himself took charge of the Hypsistae, because there Polynices himself was in the field.

When the day of battle came and the seven gates were assailed at one time, the princesses, Antigone and Ismene, received with trembling anxiety the tidings of the fray. Fierce and deadly was the fight, when from the seven gates the seven Theban captains charged with the shock of an earthquake; Kapaneus at the Elektrae had already set his foot upon the wall when Jove, whom he had defied, smote him with his lightning and hurled him blazing to the earth. Amphiaraus and Tydeus were both slain in the mêlée, and of all the invaders Adrastus alone escaped, being saved by the speed of his good horse Areion; but the gladness of the victory was destroyed, for Eteokles, the king, rushing from the Hypsistae, met Polynices his brother in mid career; and so fierce was the charge that the sons of Oedipus lay side by side in the dust, slain each by the hand of his brother.

The invading army deprived of its leaders melted

like a snow-wreath from before the city, and Kreon, son of Menoekus, once more assumed the government. The sons of Oedipus are dead (so thought Antigone in her sorrow), the curse is accomplished, and perhaps Death, the healer of strife, may have made them friends again, and in the shadowy fields, whither the august spirit of Oedipus is gone, his two fair sons may be once more united in a bond of brotherly love. So the sisters mourned and prepared the funeral rites, the honey cakes and wine, the locks of flowing hair, the black robes, offerings fit to appease the spirits of heroes who have parted in anger. But, alas ! it is not to end thus. The curses that hang over the house of Oedipus are not yet worn out ; Polynices died in arms against his native town, and a horrible idea of justice takes possession of Kreon, forgetful of the wrongs which had driven him to take up arms against Thebes. The first use he makes of his royal authority is to make proclamation that Eteokles shall be buried with all honour, because he met his death in defence of his country ; but that Polynices, whose body had been brought within the gates by his pitying countrymen for his sisters to see, should be flung out again upon the open field, to be torn by wolves and birds of prey.

When this cruel proclamation was reported to Antigone, her soul flamed up with indignation ; in life, she had loved her brothers with an equal love, or if latterly she had inclined more to Polynices, it was only the

sense of his wrong that made her thoughts dwell more on him ; now that they were dead, she would have mourned for both alike, but the dishonour put upon Polynices drew all her care to him. She angrily remonstrated with Kreon, and declared that, woman though she was, she would find means to bury him, if she carried the earth in the folds of her veil ; and she strove to work upon Ismene her sister to join her in defying the king. But Ismene was of a soft and timid temper, and much as she loved Antigone, she feared the king's anger ; and worn with many sorrows, would fain have persuaded her sister not to risk her life for an injustice which was not of her doing, but which the gods would surely avenge on Kreon.

Kreon, finding that the proclamation by which he had intended to show his patriotism and justice was not received by the Thebans with favour, but that many were disposed to sympathize with Antigone, became obstinate—as men of narrow minds are wont to do, if opposed—and refused to soften in any degree his sentence ; and knowing the resolute temper of Antigone, he caused the body of Polynices to be flung out on the plain outside the city, and set sentries to watch that no one should approach it ; adding a fresh proclamation that any one daring to inter the body of Polynices, who died in arms against his country, should be stoned to death.

All night long the sentries kept watch, pacing wearily backwards and forwards between the city and

the spot where the body lay, and the dark hours passed slowly ; but when at length the day dawned and the fresh sentries came to relieve guard, and they looked about for the body of the slain prince, it was nowhere to be seen ; at first they supposed that some wild beast had dragged it away, and sought about in consternation, but they presently became aware that the poor corpse lay just where it had been thrown, only that some kindly hand had covered it from head to foot with sand, even as wayfarers are wont to cover the body of a strange mariner wrecked on the shore ; and while they were still gazing in wonder at this bold act, a voice so loud and clear that it seemed to the poor soldiers who heard it like the voice of a god, and they bowed their heads to the ground before it, bade them at once report to Kreon what they had seen, and attempt no concealment.

As no better course suggested itself to them, the night sentries drew lots, and he on whom the lot fell went, sorely against his will, to report to the king that his mandate had been defied. Kreon, dreadfully enraged at the contempt of his decree, bade the messenger begone, threatening him with terrible vengeance if he did not discover who it was that had dared to set at naught his authority ; and the man glad to escape alive and sound of limb, returned to his watch, and sweeping off the sand from the body laid it bare to the sun, then sitting down under a hill to avoid the stench, waited with his fellows until noon was past ; but when it was

now high noon and the heat was intense, there arose a fearful whirlwind, sweeping a cloud of blinding dust before it, so that the men were glad to bow their heads and endure the misery.

The whirlwind was scarcely past when a sharp cry of agony smote their ears, a cry as of a mother-bird robbed of her little ones, and looking up they beheld beside the body of the prince a woman, holding a sacrificial vessel in her hand, and kneeling in despair beside the uncovered corpse. Thrice with loud weeping and lamentation she poured the sacrificial mixture of honey and wine upon the dead, then in eager haste gathered the dust in her hands and began to heap it on the body; but the guards, recovered from their surprise, rushed upon her, and seizing her by the arm beheld with amazement and dismay that it was no other than the princess Antigone. But the sentries chosen by Kreon were of the baser Theban type, and preferred a whole skin and the favour of the monarch to the suggestions of sympathy and virtue, and stifling such self-reproaches as their dulled consciences made to them, they dragged the unresisting lady to the palace gates.

When the eyes of Kreon rested on the culprit as she stood before him, her eyes cast upon the ground, her thin hands folded, and her fair hair unbound, the thought of her dead mother, his once beloved sister Jocasta, and of Antigone herself, a winning little damsel playing about the palace, came back upon him, so that for a moment he pitied her, and as it were to

open a loophole of escape, he asked her if she knew of his decree.

"I knew it well," said Antigone, slowly raising her truthful eyes to his and looking him in the face. "I could not fail to know it, it was public enough." "And knowing it to be my law, my decree, you dared to disobey it!" "Yea, for it bore not the stamp of highest Jove, the one true lawgiver, nor yet of Justice, who dwelleth with the gods below; and know, O king, that no ordinance of thine which runs counter to the unwritten and infallible laws of the gods, which are not of to-day, but for all time, can weigh with me. Thou threatenest me with death; hadst thou not threatened it, death will assuredly overtake me, and my lot in life has not been so enviable that I should think an untimely death other than a gain. But if I had left the body of my dear brother and sweet playfellow unburied, should I not have grieved those who are gone below, with whom I must dwell for all time?"

Incensed at the calm defiance of this speech, Kreon inquired how she who professed such respect for the dead, dared insult the brother who had died in defence of his native town, by showing equal honour to the parricide who had brought a foreign army to sack it?

"Ye have shown all honour to the gallant Eteokles," replied Antigone; "but as for me, Polynices also is my brother. I am bound to honour both alike, and it may be that in the house of Hades whither they are gone, events and acts are not judged as they are judged

here. I can love wish you, uncle, but I cannot hate with you."

As she thus spake, forth from the palace came Ismene in sad distress at her sister's danger, and when Kreon charged her with being party to the act of Antigone, she would have taken the blame of it, but this Antigone would not permit, seeing that when she had invited her assistance she had timidly shrunk back. But now Ismene, orphaned of both parents, bereaved of both brothers, clung with desperate fondness to her one sister, and when rejected by Antigone, who would not involve her in her ruin, her timid nature waxed bold from despair, and turning to Kreon, she bade him remember that Antigone was the affianced wife of Haemon, his son; but this appeal wrought nothing on Kreon's stubborn nature, for, to say truth, he had never thought it well to affiance his son to one of the house of Oedipus, seeing that from their birth they were all accursed, and Ismene only injured her sister's cause by her appeal, for Kreon angrily replied that there would be no difficulty in finding a bride for Haemon, and bade the guards at once remove her, as they had already removed Antigone; indeed, he seemed only to be the more confirmed in his resolution to leave the body of the unhappy Polynices a prey to birds and beasts, and to destroy by a cruel death the princess whose devoted love won her the admiration of all but the miserable slaves who executed the orders of the king.

Scarcely had the weeping Ismene been dragged from his presence, when the young Haemon, having heard of the danger of his betrothed, came in hot haste to endeavour to save her, and by gentle words of persuasion and entreaty strove to turn Kreon aside from his purpose, representing the strong feeling of sympathy with Antigone among the people, and the hatred he would incur if, at the opening of his reign, he sacrificed to his arbitrary will a citizen so honoured and so beloved; but when Kreon hardened his heart and would not yield, the young man waxed wrathful, and declared that so far was Antigone from deserving punishment or even censure for her act, that she was worthy of a golden honour and of imitation through all time. These words so kindled the wrath of Kreon, that he threatened to make Haemon witness the death of his betrothed, upon which the young man's soul burnt with indignation, and he rushed away declaring that he would never look upon his father's face again.

Then Kreon, in greater wrath than ever, resolved to execute at once on the princess the cruel sentence he had passed upon her, and she was dragged from the arms of her sister and from the home of her childhood, where she had seen so much of joy and so very much of grief, to a cave in the side of a hill and there entombed alive, alas ! poor lady, with a cruse of water and a loaf of bread, sad mockery of funeral rites for one so young and fair ; and that there might be no

doubt as to the exact carrying out of the sentence, Kreon himself saw it executed in all its details.

When he was but newly returned from this act, Kreon was summoned, to receive the prophet Teiresias, the man who was never known to utter a prediction that was not fulfilled, whose mouth had declared the cause of the pestilence that wasted Thebes, when Oedipus was king, and had unravelled all the woful mystery of his accursed life. Worn with age and blind, the prophet was come on a message of mercy and of warning, his eyes, insensible to objects which filled the eyes of ordinary men, beholding coming events pregnant with horror, events which it was still in Kreon's power to mould. And first he declared the insult to the body of Polynices a thing hateful to the gods, and that no victim would be received, no favourable omen given, while that poor corpse lay a prey to every ravenous creature, winged or four-footed.

Kreon, embittered at finding the aged and honoured prophet against him, relieved his heart by hurling back at him bitter jibes and base reproaches, until the prophet raised his terrible voice and declared that the sun would not set until he should himself be wailing over the dead in his own household, seeing that he had outraged the gods below by denying them their due rites, and roused against himself and his own house the terrible Erinnyes, who were even now working out vengeance on him and on the city for the wrongs done to the slain.

When the old prophet had tottered away, shaken by the terror of his own prophecies, the heart of Kreon began to fail him, and he began to distrust his own judgment, and to think that perhaps the prophet might be right, and that, though Polypices had died in arms against his country, it might have been well to remember the wrongs which had driven him to that course, and to hide the memory of the brothers' quarrel in equal funeral rites; and his repentance, being as hasty as his wrath, he summoned his attendants, and went with all speed to render the too long delayed rites to Polynices, and buried what remained of his poor body in the earth, pouring honey and wine, according to custom, and heaping the kindly earth over him.

This done, he proceeded to the hill side to deliver Antigone from her living tomb, but he came alas! too late. Haemon was there before him, and, burning with love and indignation, had forced the opening of the cave, and won a way to his beloved. But even he had come too late, for Antigone, who had borne so much horror and sorrow for her father and her brother, had lost heart, and, shuddering at the slow agonies of the living death to which she was condemned, had with hasty hand assailed her own life, and rashly set free her pure spirit. Thus, when Haemon forced his way to her, and let the light of day into the cavern, it was a dying woman whom he strained to his breast, and failing eyes that were feebly lifted to his.

Then the prophecy of Teiresias was indeed fulfilled, for Haemon, hopeless and despairing, drew his sword and plunged it into his own heart, so that when Kreon reached the caye the moans of his dying son, in death bewailing his beloved, smote upon his ears.

Thus in the flower of her youth perished Antigone, pious and beautiful, passing to the shades below by an act too rash, but worn with the sense of the dread Até^o which afflicted her house. And the gods below may have been gentle in their judgment, for surely she had been sorely tried, and, wherever filial piety and sisterly love are held in honour, the name of Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, should be spoken with reverence.



KLYTÆMNESTRA.

IN ancient days there dwelt in the fair valley of the Eurotas a noble king named Tyndareus. In his youth he had known sorrow and hardship, for he had been driven from lovely Lacedaemon, where he was born, and had wandered an exile as far as Aetolia, where Tydeus received him kindly and entertained him as long as he chose to stay. But the troubles of his youth were softened by time, until they had become pleasant memories, and it added much to the honour in which he was held by the men of the newer generation that he was able to tell tales of war and prowess, of the fierce Tydeus, and of Meleager of the clustering curls, who both died by the will of the gods in the flower of their youth.

King Tyndareus had for his wife a lovely lady, Leda, daughter of Thyestius, and there were growing up in his house four children of such rare beauty and such princely qualities, that the poets fain would have it

that they were children of Zeus ; for in those simple days men never doubted but that the Olympians concerned themselves about every chieftain and his household in the fair Achaean land. The two noble boys, Kastor and Polydeuces, who ate at the board of Tyndareus, are famous even in this later age for their strength and skill, for their helpful kindness to men, but, above all, for that brotherly love and good-fellowship which made them true friends and companions, so that men called by their names the bright twin stars, which are most welcome as a guiding beacon to mariners voyaging on the uncertain sea. When the brothers were now coming and going, as young heroes should, piercing the blue Clashers⁹ into the stormy Black Sea with Jason, or vindicating their rights against the unjust sons of Aphareus, the two daughters of Tyndareus and Leda still abode in the palace of their father. Klytaemnestra was tall and stately like Here, her crisp, wavy hair, black as ebony, formed a fine setting to her straight, strong features ; flashing eyes of the darkest brown glanced beneath her black eyebrows, her beautiful head was finely set on a neck slender and graceful as that of a swan, and she carried herself like one accustomed to rule and to be obeyed. Klytaemnestra, indeed, even from her tender youth, was strong in love and hate, and Leda, the queen, was wont to dread the firm clenching of the teeth and hands when anything crossed the fancy of the little princess, and to take refuge in the perpetual smiles

and winning tenderness of Helené, twin sister to Klytaemnestra, whose loveliness and grace were the theme of minstrels from Pylos to Ithaké. And because there was no Kalydonian boar to be slain, no golden fleece to be sought, it came to be the fashion for the princes of Achaea to resort to the palace of Tyndareus, to claim the rights of guest-friendship and hunt over the breezy hills and hollows of Lakonia, until the game threatened to become scarce, and Tyndareus, gracious and hospitable as he was, found it in his heart to wish that the gods had given him a daughter less fair, or that the Muses had given the gift of minstrelsy to fewer bards, so that her beauty had been less renowned.

It was, indeed, no small trouble to Tyndareus to know which of the many wooers to choose; for it would fare ill, he thought, with himself, with the bridegroom, and with his peerless daughter, whomsoever he should choose, seeing that all the other princes would be angry at all three. The soothsayers, too, vexed him not a little with their dark sayings, foreboding woes to come of Helené's beauty, sorrow to her native land, and bitterness of spirit to those who loved her best. It was some comfort to him, indeed, that Agamemnon, king of Argos, who, with his brother Menelaus, was come to see the wonder, ere long declared himself more charmed by the queenly graces of Klytaemnestra than by all the witcheries of her sister; but he was only at length fully relieved from his anxiety when

Odysseus, son of Laertes, came to him with this proposition.

Odysseus, indeed, was only king of rocky Ithaca and its neighbour isles, territory of small mark beside those of Argos, Mycenæ, of Arcadia, of Aetolia, of Thessaly, lands fit for the breeding of cattle, of horses, and abundant in corn-fields. But Odysseus was a man among men, a prince so wise and thoughtful that, young as he was, his words were listened to with attention by the oldest and wisest, and when now he spake to Tyndareus, the king felt half the burden of his care lifted from his shoulders.

"King Tyndareus"—it was thus that Odysseus spoke—"thy heart is sore troubled on account of thy daughter Helené, with the flowing robes, and on account of the many princes who gather to thy court anxious to call her wife, and I do not blame thee, for surely it is a grave thing to anger princes; for though they smother their wrath at the time, still they are wont to nourish a grudge against thee, and welcome any occasion of doing thee hurt."

"It is indeed even as thou sayest, wise son of Laertes; would that the gods had made Helené less fair, or that more princes were wise as Agamemnon and would fix their thoughts on other maidens, less fair perhaps, but equal to Helené in accomplishments, and in all things but the dangerous gift of matchless beauty. I am in good sooth sore perplexed. How can I choose between such men as Idomeneus, Tle-

ptolemus, the fierce Diomedes, and masterful Ajax, besides the many more equal in honour, and each keenly alive to any wrong offered to him."

And Tyndareus sighed heavily, leaning upon his ivory staff and pondering wearily. •

"It is true, O king, that any gift in excess is like to waken the envy of the gods; too much valour in a man, too much beauty in a woman—what are they but pledges of trial, of toil, perhaps even of death? yet it seems to me, O king, that I can tell thee a plan which may ease thee in great measure of thy present trouble."

"Thou wilt indeed deserve well of me, my young friend, if thou canst do this, but what reward shall I give to thee for such noteworthy help?" •

"Rich reward do I seek of thee, O king, richer to my mind than the service I render thee warrants me to ask of thee. But hearken to my counsel, which is so simple that haply thou mayest smile when thou hearest it, and yet methinks there is little doubt but that it will succeed. Summon to a council all the chieftains who now throng thy palace, and fearlessly lay thy trouble before them, and when they now feel for thee, bind them by a solemn oath to abide by the choice the princess shall make, and to aid in word and deed both her and him whom she shall choose as her husband, and avenge them on any that shall offer them wrong."

"Thy plan is a wise one," said Tyndareus slowly,

"and thou thinkest that the chieftains will readily take such an oath?"

"Ay, truly, will they; for surely each man will think that the choice of Helené will light upon himself."

"Men may well call thee crafty, son of Laertes," said the old king, smiling. "Varily we will try thy plan, but I think thou art mistaken if thou fanciest that the choice of Helené will light on thee."

"I neither anticipate such a choice, nor do I desire it," said Odysseus, smiling in his turn; "the lovely Helené would be but ill placed in my rugged home, and to say the truth, fair and clever as she is, there is one at thy court whom I would rather call wife, even Penelope, thy brother's daughter, a modest maiden, and one who will be fit for the wife of a man who has many duties and many cares. Win for me this damsel, and I shall hold myself richly paid."

"But thou wilt not shrink from taking the oath thyself?"

"No, verily, though it concerns not me. I will take the oath, yea, I will even propose it to the princes myself, if thou wilt."

Then the heart of Tyndareus was lightened, and he gladly promised to Odysseus the wise princess Penelope, with much treasure of copper and of needle-work: and the plan which Odysseus had made prospered bravely, for as he had foretold, the chieftains lightly took the oath, each thinking himself secure of the favour of the gracious Helené; and Helené herself

was well pleased to be allowed to choose her own husband ; and she passed over the most warlike and notable chieftains, and took for her lord, the younger Atreid, whose bright curls and gentle bearing had won her fancy.

Then all Lacedaemon rejoiced in the triple wedding ; some of the chieftains, it is true, found it needful to betake themselves to their homes, but the greater number remained to do honour to the brides, and to the solemn oath which they had taken. When the feasting and the games were ended, Odysseus went on board his well-planked black ship and bore his bride to his beloved Ithaca, where dwelt the aged Laertes and Antikleia, his dear father and mother ; Helené and Menelaus abode with Tyndareus in Sparta, but Agamemnon carried his wife Klytaemnestra in his chariot through the level lands of Tegea, beneath the Arcadian hills, to his own home in Argos.

There they dwelt together for many prosperous years, and three daughters, Iphigeneia, Chrysothemis, and Elektra, were born to them, and last of all, like a bright gleam of summer in autumn time, the little Orestes, their one, beloved son.

And now Klytaemnestra was grown a stately queen, and though she loved her children and was pleased to have for her husband the greatest king in all the Achæan land, there came ever and again occasions for chafing and impatience, for his great power had fostered the haughtiness of Agamemnon and made

him proud and impatient of contradiction, but still they were on the whole happy, and might have been happier with their three daughters, now almost grown up, and the little Orestes, as the crown of their wedlock; but alas! their lives were not to end so peacefully, for the fates had sorrow and sin in store for them, wrong and vengeance at which the ears of men should tingle, wherever the Achæan name was spoken through the ages.

When men had now well nigh forgotten their plighted hands, and the oaths sworn by them at the wooing of Helené, that they would avenge wrong done to her, or to her husband, the hour appointed from the beginning came, and from hollow Lacedaemon to remotest Phthia rang the tidings that Helené had been treacherously carried off by a false guest-friend, Alexander, or as he was sometimes called Paris, one of the many sons of Priam, king of Troy; and Menelaus and Agamemnon his brother called upon all the chieftains to remember their oaths, and to pursue the faithless Trojan, and recover the lost queen. Then was there wailing of women, and much sorrow through the land, for they knew this Troy of old, how it was a wealthy city, and how haughty and faithless its princes were, for had not the mighty Herakles himself sacked it because of the treachery of Laomedon, its king, who refused him the meed of the horses of Neptune, which he had promised him for the preservation of Hesione his daughter? and was it likely that the Trojans would

hearken to justice now? nay, was it not known that Priam, the king, had threatened that he would have vengeance for Hesione, his sister, whom Herakles had carried away as a slave, and given to his friend Telamon of Salamis, and would he be likely to give up such a rich prize as Helené, daughter of Tyndareus and wife of Menelaus?

Then a great council of chiefs was held at Argos, and it was resolved on no account to let the wrong pass, but to go, if need were, even to Troy itself to win back Helené, and to level the proud city with the dust. First, however, it was decreed to send ambassadors who should solemnly set forth the wrongs, and demand back the lady, and for this purpose Menelaus himself declared that he would go, and from all the chieftains he chose Odysseus of Ithaké to bear him company. The two went in a swift ship and were courteously received in the city of Priam and entertained by Antenor his chief counsellor, but alas! they found Priam and all his people, Hektor alone excepted, bent on keeping the fair prize, who with her winning sweetness had beguiled the hearts of all men there, as in the land of her birth: had not Medeia been carried off by Jason of Phærae, and their own Hesione dragged away to spend a weary life on the rock of Salamis, and why should they alone of all men be called upon to acknowledge themselves in the wrong, to make compensation and to give back the lady? They would not heed that Helené was a wedded wife and a queen, and

that Alexander had broken the rights of hospitality by carrying her away.

So Menelaus and Odysseus returned empty-handed and wrathful, and another great council was held at Argos and instant action resolved upon, and so widely was the tale of Menelaus' wrong spread, that the name of Troy and of the treacherous Alexander grew familiar in every hall, and from Pylos to Akrokeraunia there was nothing but building of ships, forging of arms, fitting of chariots, and mustering of men; and Agamemnon, both because of his wealth and power and because he was own brother to Menelaus, was chosen commander in chief of the expedition.

Klytaemnestra aided her husband with counsel and with her hands during all the busy time; and no chieftain went to the war more richly furnished with tunics or with cloaks, with sandals or with armour and all things that become a prince, and perhaps she was not altogether displeased at the thought of being sole ruler of his wide domain while he should be away: but when the day of his departure was come, and he stood ready to step on board his ship, shining in armour, and took his little boy in his arms, who patted his breastplate and begged to be taken to the war, a shadow of great sorrow came over the soul of Klytaemnestra as she stood looking on with her fair young daughters, and but for her pride she would have shrieked aloud and begged him on her knees to tarry with her.

The parting also was grievous to Agamemnon, for he lingered after he had given his boy back into the arms of the nurse, and looked at the tearful faces of his daughters, and Iphigeneia leapt into his arms and clung about his neck, sobbing and begging him to take her with him. But the wind was whistling in the sails, and the sailors were bending on their oars, and Agamemnon gently unclasped her arms, bade her comfort her mother and take care of the little Orestes, and then he went slowly down the beach and climbed into his black ship, and Klytaemnestra and her children stood and watched till the last faint speck had passed from their sight, then they wended their way slowly back to the desolate palace.

Then came days of weary watching for news, glad tidings of the mighty muster at Aulis, of the martial spirit of the princes. Then a month passed and no tidings came, and Klytaemnestra and her maidens talked day by day, as they plied the loom, of where the Achaean host might be, and wondered if Helené were yet recovered, and the city of Troy taken; then came another messenger with tidings of delay and trouble. The ships were still lying becalmed at Aulis, no breath of wind would rise to fill a sail, and the rowers could not row all the way from Aulis to the Troad without a favourable wind to lighten their toil. In vain Agamemnon chafed with impatience, in vain sacrifices smoked on the altars of the gods, a sullen calm rested on the deep, and Kalchas, the soothsayer, who knew the pre-

sent, the past, and the future, held a gloomy silence and would give no word of counsel or guidance.

The harvest was gathered in, women and girls aiding the old men and boys in the corn-fields, and the wine was foaming in the vats, when yet another messenger came heavy and weary, greeting the queen from Agamemnon, and bidding her make supplication to every god in Argos, but chiefly to Artemis, whom Agamemnon had displeased by slaying her white heifer in her sacred grove long years before.

Then Klytaemnestra made solemn processions to the shrines, to Heré, to Pallas Athene, but chiefly to Artemis, if perchance she would be gracious and forgive, for the queen remembered only too well how Agamemnon, chasing the hind too eagerly, had killed it in the very grove of the goddess, who in wrath would have slain him, but that he vowed to offer on her altar the fairest creature that should be born that year. Alas! the queen remembered also that that year Iphigeneia had been born, and what creature of earth or air could compare with her for beauty or for endowments? Heifers and ewe-lambs, the choicest of their kind, had smoked continuously on her altars, had not Klytaemnestra seen to it? and the maiden had been always fair to look on and sweet as she was fair. Could it be that the goddess would comprehend her in her father's rash vow? could the life of a beautiful human being, like Iphigeneia, be really demanded for the life of a hind, however beautiful, however beloved by the goddess?

Then day by day the queen besieged the gods with prayers, jealously watching to shield Iphigeneia from harm, and the days dragged on wearily ; then, when another month was nearly out, there came news from the king, no common runner this time, crossing the narrow neck of land at Corinth, but a well-planked black ship, with a hundred and twenty stalwart rowers pulling her over the becalmed waters. As soon as the prow had touched the sand, there leapt ashore two princes, and the heart of Klytaemnestra smote her as she recognized Diomedes, son of Tydeus, and Odysseus of Ithake. On what message were these brave men come ? for what grave purpose had such leaders left the army ?

Nevertheless she went down with her maidens to welcome them, and brought them up to the palace, and gave them water for their feet and food, before she asked them a question, and the princes on their side seemed in little haste to disburden themselves of their message ; but when they had eaten as much as they would, and the brimming wine-cups stood before them, Klytaemnéstra asked tidings of the king and of the host, and how it was that they still were on Achæan land.

Then the son of Tydeus looked at Odysseus, and Odysseus slowly spoke. He told of the pitiless calm which still kept them weatherbound, of the impatience of the chiefs, and how at last Kalchas had declared that it was in the power of Agamemnon alone to

loosen the winds, if he would give his daughter, the sweet-voiced Iphigeneia, to be wedded by Achilles, the son of Peleus.

"To be wedded by the son of the silver-footed Thetis, the bravest and most beautiful of all the brave and gallant chiefs in the Achæan armament!" exclaimed Klytaemnestra, "what fitter bridegroom could we find for our daughter—why should Agamemnon hesitate?"

"Thou knowest, lady, that the son of Peleus is bound on a distant expedition; for the wide-wayed Troy cannot be taken—so the Moiræ will it—unless Achilles, the sacker of cities, be with the army."

"And are not all the Achæan women widows through this dismal war? Iphigeneia will be no worse off than I and Penelope, and many a princess beside. Achilles is the handsomest and the bravest of all the men now upon earth, seeing that the Dioskuri dwell no longer among men, and there is no one born of mortal woman who can compare with him. Let him take Iphigeneia, since the gods so will it. I myself will conduct her to Aulis to bless their marriage, then she and I will return back hither, and we two widows will besiege the gods with prayers to give us back our lords, and to blot out the reproach of Helen's flight."

At these words of the queen the brow of Diomedes darkened, and Odysseus said, sadly,

"Nay, lady, but it is the strait command of the gods that the damsel return to thee no more, and it

were well that thou shouldst abide here at home, where the affairs of the kingdom so much need thy presence ; only send the damsel with us, the damsel and her nurse."

Then the brow of Klytaemnestra flushed, and she answered, angrily, "Think not, son of Laertes, that thou canst rule me as thou rulest thine own wife ; I set up no claim to prudence and wifely submission. If Iphigeneia go to Aulis, I, her mother, go with her."

Then Diomedes made as if he would have spoken, but Odysseus signed to him to hold his peace, for he knew of old the fierce temper of Klytaemnestra, and that they would gain nothing by opposing her.

"Be it as thou wilt, lady," he said ; "only be speedy, for the gods, as thou knowest, brook no delay when they have once declared their will."

Then Klytaemnestra bade prepare her chariot, for she would not go with the warriors in the ship, and she took Iphigeneia and the little Orestes, that the sight of him might gladden his father's heart, and store of costly robes such as a queen should give her daughter, and ornaments of silver and of gold, and they drove through the pleasant land until they came to Aulis.

There who can tell of the dreadful deed that was done ? Of the bride, no bride at all, but a sad victim offered at the altar of the offended deity ; of the father forgetting his fatherhood, and giving up the first-born and best-beloved of his children to untimely fate, that he might still be commander of that proud arma-

ment, and that the wrong of his brother might be avenged ?

Achilles, though he had not been privy to the guile by which Odysseus had brought the poor princess to the camp, and knew nothing of those pretended nuptials, was stung to the heart with grief for the maiden and with indignation at the falsehood, and though he had no mind to wed the daughter of Agamemnon, yet drew his silver-hilted sword and would have shielded her with his own body, but the high-souled maiden put him aside, she would have no stranger come between her and her fate, and he could only stand with the other chiefs, an awc-struck witness of the penalty exacted for the father's rash vow.

From that hour all that was sweet and gentle in the nature of Klytaemnestra was changed to bitterness and wrath. When she learnt to what sort of wedding she had brought her dear child, she left the tents of Agamemnon, which she had entered with such high hopes, in wrath, refusing to hearken to aught that he could urge, or to any sound of comfort, though Kalchas the prophet would fain have persuaded her that the damsel had not been slain by the sacrificial knife, but that Artemis had herself carried her to some secret place of peace and safety, putting in her stead a milk-white hind, whose limbs had indeed quivered on the altar, and whose innocent flesh had been consumed as a burnt-offering. But that she might wreak her vengeance more securely, she feigned to take some comfort from

what they told her of the heroic devotion of her child, who, when she understood that her life would save the honour of her country, had been impatient to render it, and pressed forward to the sacrifice, as to her crown of glory.

Thus the wrath of Artemis was at length appeased, and soft southerly winds filled the sails, the heroes bent on their oars, and all the mighty armament of the Achaeans was borne over the dancing waves of the Aegean, past the lovely isles, to the plain of the Skamander, where in the ancient city of Priam the long-robed Helene still dallied with her paramour.

For ten weary years the Achaeans tented about Troy, sacking the allied cities, but unable to get possession of the town or to scale the walls built by Poseidon and Apollo. Often a wearisome longing for home and peace came over them, and they would have been glad to leave Helene a boast to the Trojans and to go away home to their own wives and children, who needed them so much; but Kalchas, the wise seer, heartened them up with assurance of coming success, and they thought shame to have tarried so long and to go away empty-handed. But at last the fated ten years were spent, and the streets of Troy rung with the shouts of the victors, and her stately palaces flared in conflagration. Helene was recovered, and the Achaeans were free to return once more each to his own home.

From point to point, from headland to headland,

the glad tidings were told by beacons kept ready all those weary years, and the sentinel, pacing the highest tower of Argos, beheld with incredulous joy the flashing light making the darkness glad, and hastened with the tidings to the queen.

Troy was taken, the army disbanded, and Agamemnon coming home. How will Klytaemnestra meet him? Has she forgotten her daughter, torn from her embrace under the false pretence of marriage? Alas! no; nor has she been deaf to the rumours that have come from Asia of the causes which delayed the Achaean host so long before Troy; she has heard of the fair captive maid, Chryseis, whom Agamemnon rashly declared that he preferred to herself, needlessly dragging forward her name in the open council of the chiefs; she has heard of that maiden, scarcely less fair, for whose dear sake the son of Thetis withdrew from the war and lay for months idle at his ships;—and now how will he come home?

Elektra and Chrysothemis, who were but children when their father went away, are grown into graceful young women, fair indeed, but not so fair as she who perished at Aulis; and the baby Orestes, with his laughing eyes and sunny curls, will he be on the threshold to welcome home his sire, a youth worthy of his great ancestry—like Pyrrhus, the son of Achilles, who, though with little more than the down upon his lip, is rich in honour and in spoil as the eldest of the chieftains?

Alas ! godlike Agamemnon, like to Jove in brow, to Poseidon in girth of chest, beware how thou return to the wife thou hast insulted, the mother thou hast outraged ! Greater dangers than ever compassed thee at 'Troy await thee in thine own halls ! Thine enemy, the hereditary enemy of thy house, sits in thy seat, welcomed to her counsels, yea, to her embraces, by thy wife ; common hatred to thee the tie that binds them, insatiable longing to avenge slaughtered kinsfolk the sacrament of their accursed love. Elektra and Chrysothemis are oppressed and sorrow-stricken, and the boy Orestes, with difficulty rescued from his mother's wrath by the courage of Elektra, dwells an exile in a foreign land.

But no tidings of the evil doings in his home had reached the king, who came flushed with victory, and madly bringing with him in his own chariot the lovely prophetess Cassandra, the precious honour-gift chosen for him out of all the captives at the division of the spoil. In vain the unhappy lady warned and entreated, in vain she declared that death and slaughter awaited him. Confident and exulting, Agamemnon beheld once more his people and his palace, beheld once more the wife of his youth, who received him at the threshold with costly garments spread in his path and words of extravagant delight, as though he had been a god returning to his shrine, not a poor, sinful man entering the gates of Hades.

Into the palace he went, where the refreshing bath

was prepared, and she, Klytaemnestra herself, waited on him, holding the soft, newly-woven tunic, the work of her loom. Meanwhile without, the Trojan princess would not quit the chariot, for in rapt vision she beheld the ghastly welcome prepared for the king, and scented the coming slaughter.

Beside the queen, to aid if need were, stood the swarthy Aegisthus, son of Thyestes, the house-foe of Agamemnon and all the race of Atreus ; but it was not the hand of Aegisthus that smote the king. The embittered soul of Klytaemnestra nerved her hand to deal the blow, while Agamemnon struggled to find his way into the garment which she had treacherously sewn up, yea, and to smite him a second and even a third time, until the king of men lay at her feet crushed and silent, like a slaughtered ox. Then she dared to show to all the people the body of her slain husband, to proclaim her deed, and to justify it as an act of vengeance for her beloved child Iphigeneia, whose precious life he had sacrificed to his ambition.

Aegisthus also in his turn exulted over his dead foe, regarding his slaughter as an offering due to the spirit of Thyestes, cruelly persecuted by Atreus ; and the people listened in silence, afraid to defy openly the adulterous pair, who had known how to strengthen their hands with bribes at home and abroad, and Elektra and Chrysothemis mourned in silence, and nursed their anger against the murderers of their father, waiting till Orestes should hear of it and come for vengeance.

Months passed on, and the gods seemed to have forgotten, and the grave outside the city gate where the last of her kings was laid was little frequented, little thought of, save for the two wan women who crept at break of day or in the night time to make their moan there, and offer wine and honey to the injured spirit, for Menelaus was not yet home from his wanderings, and Orestes still abode with Strophios in Phocis, into whose charge Elektra had delivered him when the queen made her terrible league with Aegisthus, knowing that if he could lay hands on the boy, the son of Thyestes would gladly slay him as the first fruits of his vengeance. •

For eight years Aegisthus and Klytaemnestra ruled as king and queen in Argos, and the people endured their rule, fearing that worse might come; but the prosperity of the wicked is like a fair flower that opens wide its petals in the morning, but in the evening lies trampled and dishonoured on the highway. All at once, with no sign of trouble or disaffection among the people to account for it, all at once great agony of soul came upon Klytaemnestra, her sleep went from her, or if she closed her eyes in sleep, terrible visions frightened her awake again; her murdered husband stood before her, and all she had said and thought of the justice of her act failed her; her sin had found her out, and she trembled.

Sacrifices of milk and honey must be carried to the tomb of Agamemnon, his unquiet spirit must be

soothed with words of tenderness and submission ; but Klytaemnestra dares not go : she sends Elektra and the train of Trojan women who had come with Agamemnon from Asia, to sacrifice and to sing hymns to him.

Elektra willingly obeyed, but when she reached the grave and prepared to lay her offerings on it, she was amazed to see that some one had been before her, for carefully disposed upon the top of the tomb was a curl of hair, the appropriate offering of the next of kin to the spirit of the hero. At this sight a great flush of joy and surprise came over Elektra, for she was well assured that it could be no other than her dear brother Orestes who had placed the curl there, but she trembled with apprehension lest Aegisthus should learn that the exile was returned, and seize him and put him to death. And while she stood bewildered between joy and fear, lo ! Orestes and Pylades, his cousin and trusty friend, feeling sure that she must be Elektra, came forward, and having made themselves known to her, Orestes told her how he was come at the behest of the dread Phoebus to avenge the death of his father ; and the brother and sister planned together that Orestes should come as a traveller from Phocis, charged with a message from Strophios, the king, concerning the disposal of the body of Orestes, who was dead, whether the king and queen desired that his obsequies should be performed there, where he had died, or whether they wished that his remains should

be conveyed to Argos, there to receive their due rites.

That Orestes was dead was joyful news to Aegisthus and to Klytaemnestra, for the thought of him had been grievous to them ever since the death of his father, and Aegisthus was so keen to hear all details that he hurried to the supposed messenger alone and unattended, and fell an easy prey to the strong young hands of the son of Agamemnon ; but to slay Klytaemnestra was a harder task, for when she knew that it was Orestes, and that he had come to wreak his vengeance on her guilty head, she who had been no mother to him, yea, who but now was rejoicing at the tidings of his death, clung about his knees, calling him by the tenderest names and grovelling at his feet.

It was a cruel fate that darkened the life of the young Orestes ; to do just honour to his father, and to give him his due place among the spirits of the departed, he was commanded by the irresistible behest of Phoebus, to destroy that body from which he was himself sprung, and no sooner was the terrible deed accomplished than agonies of guilt and remorse drove him from city to city, taking the form of the serpent-haired Eumenides, daughters of Jove the avenger, and of the ghastly spirit of Klytaemnestra urging them on.

Sleepless and haggard he wandered, until at length they came to Athens, the city of Cekrops, and to the temple of the just and holy Athena, and there, before

the august council that met on Ares' hill, the two pleaded their cause; Phoebus on behalf of Orestes on the one side, the Eumenides on behalf of Klytaemnestra on the other. Then the blue-eyed daughter of Jove gave judgment in favour of Orestes, holding him free of guilt in the necessary act, which by the order of the god he had done, and the spirit of Klytaemnestra slid shrieking into the house of Hades, and troubled the world no more.



HELENE.

HELENE of the flowing robe, the loveliest woman of her time, and the cause of bitterest woe to many gallant men and true-hearted women. Who can picture the sweetness and beauty of form and face which gathered the Achaean princes from Messene to remote Phthia to the court of Tyndareus, and there so bewitched them that they were willing, every man among them, to bind themselves by oath to defend her and him whom she should choose, against all aggression, whenever or by whomsoever they might be wronged.

Married in her early womanhood to a husband of her own choice, who loved her with a blind devotion, it was hard to see what was wanting to make the lot of Helene blessed. The palace was richly adorned with all beautiful things, and they had one little daughter, named Hermione, almost equal to her mother in beauty. How pleasant were the hollows of hill-girt Laconia, how sweet the flowing Eurotas to

Helene as she wandered among them and beside it with her little daughter ! how sweet the evening hours when the little maid was asleep, and Helene sat among her maids directing their tasks, and herself executing works of marvellous skill and beauty. Alas ! that so fair a day should darken at its noon !

There came from beyond the sea an adventurous prince, skilled in all the arts of war—most skilled in minstrelsy, for he could draw such sounds from his ivory lyre that those who heard were moved to tears or stirred to martial ardour at his will—Alexander, sometimes called Paris, son of Priam and Hekabé, a prince of Troy. Menelaus made him royally welcome, for he was much interested in learning the manners and customs of foreign nations, and there was no city equal in fame and power in those days to Troy, whose princes traced back their race in a double line to supreme Jove, and who boasted of the special favour of Poseidon and Apollo. Alexander was himself a young man of a most winning presence. He had been nursed in adversity, for owing to a terrible dream by which his mother was visited just before his birth, he had been laid upon the mountains when an infant, and only saved from a cruel death by the pity of a shepherd, who brought him up as his own son, until such time as he declared his princely birth by gallant deeds in defence of the flocks from wild beasts and marauders, and was welcomed back to the palace by his admiring kinsfolk. Godlike Alexander, as his people loved to

call him, had learnt by this bringing up to be all things to all men : he could talk of battle and ambuscades with Menelaus ; he could hold Helene and her maidens in rapt delight while he sung to them, and he had tender words for the little Hermione ; and though he tarried week after week while his ship lay drawn up at Taenaron, he did not seem to his hosts to tarry long, but they ever made him more and more welcome.

In an evil hour a message came from Argos from Agamemnon the king, calling on Menelaus to keep his tryst, and go with him to hunt boars in Arkadia. Menelaus desired to take his guest with him, but the subtle Asiatic knew how to excuse himself without awakening suspicion. No sooner was the king fairly gone than he set about to corrupt his queen, and, partly by persuasion, partly by violence, he wrought upon her so that she turned her back upon her palace and all her happy life, and sailed with him over the seas in his Phrygian ships.

How bitter and how frequent were her self-reproaches ! But was she not the sworn votary of Aphrodite, and had not Aphrodite herself promised her as wife to Paris ? who, for his part, was also bound by strong vows and by the memories of many happy days to Aenone, the nymph of Ida, who had loved him when he was a solitary shepherd, making sweet music in the glades. Weak and beautiful, better they had died, and all their winsome graces turned to

loathsomeness ere they forgot their truth and honour, and became a name of desolation and misery each to his home and country !

The blue waters of the great midland sea shone beneath sun and moon, and the flying queen almost forgot her sin in the loveliness of the sea and the shining islands, skimming with full sails ever further and further from Lacedaemon up northward to the great capital of the ancient king ; for Aphrodite herself had won from blustering Acolus gentle winds, and Hera and Athene were holden by the Fates from wreaking their vengeance on the fugitives, that the full measure of their guilt might be made up. Nevertheless, their voyage was not without its note of warning ; for when they were now in the midst of the blue waters, and the full moon hung like a golden shield in the sky, the ship suddenly stood still : the sails flapped idly against the mast, and the weary rowers toiled in vain. A supernatural calm brooded over sea and air, and from the bosom of the waters rose the white head of the old sea-god Nereus, with sad and threatening aspect.

Loud and angry was his speech, for all the terrible future rose at his bidding, and the infatuated prince heard, but heard in vain, of the mighty warriors who should arm in the pursuit, of the desolation of Troy, and, finally, of his own dishonoured death ! Alas ! for him who enters on the path of sin ; and yet again alas ! for him there are no backward steps. The avengers of his crime drive him deeper and deeper

into the mire, until it overwhelms him, and he passes from the ken of man into the unknown.

When Alexander at last reached his native shore, the king and queen made haste to receive the lady of whose matchless beauty they had heard so much, and although they would have gladly had Helene a maid rather than a wife, yet Priam could not but rejoice that vengeance was come at last for his fair sister Hesione, carried away by Herakles and given to Telamon of Salamis to be his wife; and for those other Asiatic princesses dragged from home and country by the bold Achæan seafarers. And who of mortal mould ever looked on the face of Helene and had the heart to blame her? However they might blame her when she was away, no one could withstand the witchery of her feminine grace, of her modest looks—for she was no brazen adulteress, defying the laws she had outraged, but a shrinking woman, foremost to heap accusations on herself, but ever lacking the strength to do the right she knew.

Though Troy shook to her centre, and loss upon loss for ten weary years broke the hearts of king and people; though Hektor, bravest of his race, maintained the unequal contest, hopeless but undismayed, until his lifeless body was dragged round the walls for which he had fought; though the prophecy of Nereus was wrought out upon Alexander, and his love-locks were at last dragged in the dust,—she who was the cause of all the woe went in and out of the palaces, weaving

her skilled embroideries, and not denied a place among the princesses, though many sorrowed for her sake and eyed her askance.

- But Aphrodite, her sweet patroness, fenced her round with witcheries and love; and when at length the city was taken, and Deiphobus, the brother of Paris, to whom on his death she had been given as wife, fell a victim to the vengeful wrath of Menelaus, no word of blame fell on Helene's ears; nay, she returned with him to the Achæan land his honoured queen and wife, as though no blight had ever fallen on her, and all the blood of Achæans and Trojans which had mingled with the waters of Simois and Skamander had not been shed for the sake of her fatal beauty.

Odysseus, Diomedes, Nestor, and Menelaus, first of the princes, set sail on their return from Troy, although Agamemnon would fain have delayed his brother for a solemn sacrifice to the displeased Athena; and thus the brothers parted in some wrath, never again to meet on this mortal earth.

The four kings sailed to Tenedos; there they offered a solemn sacrifice, and all went well with them until they reached Lesbos. Here a mighty storm overtook them, and scattered them in different directions over the sea. Menelaus and Helene from this time forth for many years wandered from coast to coast, visiting Cyprus, Phœnicia, Egypt, and Libya, where the horned men abide, and where the sheep drop lambs thrice in the year. In their voyagings they

gathered much art treasure, of gold and silver and needlework, and Helene learned much medicinal skill in Egypt, the cradle of science, from Polydamna, wife of Thon, the hospitable king of that land.

In the isle of Pharos, but a day's sail from Egypt, they were detained by contrary winds and half famished, having nothing to subsist on but such fish as they were able to catch, and they might have perished there had not the gracious sea-maid Eidothea, daughter of the mighty Proteus, taken pity on them. She taught Menelaus how to wrest from her father such information as should enable him to rescue himself and his people from their broiling prison.

By her direction he chose out three of the sturdiest and trustiest of his comrades, and when the rosy dawn coloured the eastern sky, he went down to the sea-shore, having first earnestly supplicated the gods to prosper his enterprise. No sooner did the Achæan warriors reach the line of sand than from the broad bosom of the deep rose the gracious sea-maid Eidothea, and she brought with her an unsavoury burden—four seal-skins newly flayed. She then made hollows in the sand big enough for the men to lie in, and she placed the men in them side by side, and over each she drew a seal-skin, so that it looked as though four seals lay sleeping on the shore.

Never in all his multitudinous adventures had Menelaus suffered such misery, not though he had lain in the womb of the wooden horse, when it groaned and

trembled beneath the spear of Laokoon, for the stench of the newly-flayed skins, as they lay beneath them in the sunshine from dawn till full noon, was so horrible that they could not have endured it had not the sea-maid, beholding their misery, brought them ambrosia, the divine perfume of which refreshed their senses and overcame the stench.

So there with heroic patience they lay until the great flock of the seals came thronging up from the sea, and lay down to sleep upon the beach. With them was Proteus himself, their shepherd, who having counted the flock and finding the tale complete lay down also to sleep, never perceiving the trick. No sooner had Proteus closed his eyes than Menelaus and his men rushed upon him with a shout and seized him firmly, but the old sea god, though taken unawares, did not forget his cunning. First he became a bearded lion, then a serpent, then a leopard, then a foaming boar ; and when these monsters did not appal them, he sought to slip from their fingers like running water. Then he became a tree swaying in the wind, then a flame of fire ; but the Achaeans, forewarned by Eidothea, never slackened their grasp ; until at length seeing his craft availed him nothing, Proteus took again his natural form, and demanded of Menelaus what he wanted. " Nay," said the son of Atreus, " art not thou learned in all knowledge, seeing that thou art god and prophet ; thou knowest how we are pent in this rocky prison house and cannot by any means win out."

Then Proteus bade him offer solemn sacrifice to Jove and the other gods if he would ever see his native land again, and he told him that to be acceptable to the Immortals this sacrifice must be offered on the banks of the great Egyptian river. At this announcement bitter disappointment smote the heart of Menelaus, for he had hoped that he had looked his last upon the swarthy Nile; but he had borne disappointment too often to murmur at the will of the gods, so he promised that he would do as Proteus commanded him, and he took occasion to gather tidings of the fate of the many friends he had left in Troy. Then Proteus told him, nothing loth, of Ajax Oïleus, whose rash impiety shipwrecked him half way to his home, of Agamemnon carried safe through the tempest by the gracious care of Heré, but slain treacherously in his own palace by the working of Aegisthus, his hereditary foe. •

When he heard of the death of his brother, Menelaus wept sore, sitting on the wet sea sand, so that Proteus pitied him and bade him cheer up, for that he should find when he reached Argos that Aegisthus in his turn was slain by the young Orestes, and should have the happiness of joining in solemn funeral honours to his brother. Then Menelaus would know something of his trusty friend and ally Odysseus, whether he had succeeded in getting home to his beloved Ithaké and to the friends he loved so dearly; but Proteus told him that he was detained sorely

against his will in the halls of Kalypso, daughter of Atlas, having lost all his comrades; then turning to Menelaus himself, the god said:—

“Hast thou nō desire to learn aught of thyself and of thy wife, son of Atreus?”

“Yea, fain would I know what shall be the end of our lives and whether we shall abide together until the end, though methinks he is a bold man who will thrust himself into the counsels of the Moirae.”

“Ay, truly is he! for what in the accomplishment is easy as sleep, in the anticipation often seems hard as death; but do thou take comfort, the troubles of thy life are nearly at an end, nothing shall ever separate thee more from Helene, fairest of women, and as thou hast been her true husband all thy life and so art son-in-law of Jove, the Styx shall never be passed by thee, but the Immortals themselves shall conduct thee with Helene by a path of their own to the Elysian plains; yea, to the ends of the earth, where the auburn-haired Rhadamanthus holds sway, and where temperate breezes from the ocean-stream maintain the life of man in full vigour—where there is no snow, nor heavy rain, but sweet, temperate weather all the year round.”

Then Proteus, having uttered this gracious prophecy, blew his horn, and straightway all the lithe seals began to lift their heads and to push their huge bodies down the level sands, and with a mighty sound of splashing water to plunge into the bosom of the deep; and when

they were now all gone, Proteus himself seemed to the Achaeans as they gazed on him to vanish in a wreath of mist, his hoary hair and beard floating on the waves till they were lost in the sea foam ; and as he vanished there arose the low sighing of a gentle wind, and the heat of that terrible island was softened, and Menelaus went up from the shore to where Helene waited, and gladly bade her bestir herself, for the good wind was come which would take them back once more to the hospitable court of Thon, where they must needs tarry to make the great sacrifice, without which they could never see again their native land.

Then Helene gladly arose and went on ship-board ; and so it was that when the gods were duly appeased, they at length in the eighth year of their voyaging beheld once more the longed-for Achaean shore, and the first land that was given to their eyes was Argos, and there they learnt the truth of the first prophecy of Proteus, how Agamemnon, being slain by Klytaemnestra and Aegisthus, was now newly avenged by Orestes, his son.

Menelaus and Helene, grieved at the sorrows of the house, joined Elektra, Krysothemis, and Orestes in solemn rites to Agamemnon, and in funeral ceremonies to Klytaemnestra whose body was hidden in the earth, and to whose angry spirit her children offered vain sacrifice ; but Aegisthus was flung out dishonoured for the birds of the air to rend and the beasts of the field to devour.

These sad duties rendered, Menelaus and Helene gladly turned their faces southward ; and it was given them once more to behold their stately palace, and to hold their beloved daughter Hermione in their arms.

Here they dwelt for many days in peace and honour, and here they were visited by many princes ; among others by Telemachus, son of Odysseus, when he was come abroad to seek news of his father ; and the Ithacan prince was so dazzled by the flash of bronze, of gold and of silver, of amber and of ivory in the great hall of the palace, that he was unable to control his admiration, and exclaimed in his simple way, that surely such must be the palace of Olympian Jove.

But toil and wanderings had chastened the hearts of Menelaus and his queen, and often as they sat, she with her distaff, he leaning on his sceptre, clouds of great shame and sorrow darkened their minds thinking of the years that were gone, and of the brave men whose lives had been made miserable or prematurely ended on their account ; nor were they without a present and personal sorrow, for Hermione, their one child, became a cause of grief and almost a quarrel to them. In his gratitude for his great services in bringing the war to an end, Menelaus had promised his daughter to Pyrrhus, son of Achilles, and in spite of the entreaties of his wife, and the aversion of the maiden, he insisted on carrying through the nuptials ; but Hermione loved not the fierce warrior, nay, rather she loved Orestes her unhappy cousin, wandering from

shore to shore, pursued by the furies of his mother, and Helene pitied them both, and would gladly have helped them. So that when now Orestes, being pronounced free from guilt by the dread court on the Areopagus, made use of his freedom to seek out Neoptolemus, and, meeting him at Delphi, there slew him, and seizing on Hermione brought her home with him to Argos, Helene managed to soften the anger of Menelaus, and to make him give consent to the union of the lovers.

Then in due time, before age had dimmed her beauty or weakened his manly strength, the mysterious visitants foretold by Proteus appeared, and at their call the king and queen arose once more—leaving their pleasant home—but this time side by side, and departed for ever to the blessed fields where eternal joys awaited them.



PENELOPE.

PENELOPE, daughter of Ikarius, abode with her father at Lacedaemon, and was well content to know that, while her cousin Helen was wooed by kings and chiefs from Arcadia to remote Phthia, she was sought as wife by one man, Odysseus, son of Laertes, who, although Ithake, which was the chief of his island dominions, was so rugged and so small that it did not afford a plain large enough to drive a chariot in, was yet a man of mark in any council of men, for Zeus himself had endowed him with wisdom and understanding, and his true heart and lofty soul were worth many kingdoms in the eyes of the prudent young Penelope. But Ikarius, the brother of Tyndareus, had no wife, and only two daughters, Penelope and Iphthima, and Iphthima was already given in marriage to Eumelus; how could he give up his dear Penelope to go over the sea, and remain alone by himself in his old age? Lacedaemon was a fairer land than Ithake; let Odysseus forget his sea-girt rock and abide with

him : he would make him rich and he should be listened to in the councils of the chieftains, and have the weight he deserved to have in the broad Achæan land.

But Odysseus could not hearken, for his rocky isle was dear to him and his people, and the noble Laertes and Antikleia, whose one child he was, so he answered Ikarius that he thanked him heartily for his good-will, but that he was not free to give up the duties which Zeus had appointed him, for others of his own choosing ; and that it was preferable to him to live and labour with his own people rather than to eat the bread of indolence in lordly Lacedæmon. *

Then the heart of Ikarius clave to his daughter, and when she was now going forth with Odysseus and had already got some way from the palace, the old man followed her with tears, entreating her not to leave him, for sons he had, but no daughter now in his house, and what are sons compared with a daughter to an old man who has lost his wife ? So tender and so bitter were his words that the heart of Odysseus smote him, and turning to Penelope, who stood beside him, he said :—

“Speak thou, Penelope ; if thy heart bids thee abide with him, fear not to say so ; remain here with thy father, and I will go alone to my home and to my parents.”

Then Penelope stood still, and her heart was well nigh riven asunder : she was now pale as marble, now

rosy red, and she stood silent while a man might count threescore, then covering her face with her veil, she said softly :—

“ Father, it is the will of the Immortals that a woman follow her husband ; let me go with mine.”

Then Ikarius entreated her no more, but he sent her away with blessings, only in memory of her parting he sought out a cunning artist, who wrought a fair image of a maiden hiding her face with a veil, and Ikarius called the statue Modesty, and set it up on the spot where Penelope had stood when she made her choice.

Happy days then dawned on the wedded lovers as they coasted Messenia and Elis and came to rock-bound Aithake ; happy days when Odysseus brought her to his palace, and when the royal Laertes and the gentle Antikleia gave her such welcome as men give to flowers in spring.

Then the joyous hours flew by, for Odysseus, the man of many plans, was never without his hands full ; care for the people, care for his own household, head-work and hand-work made the happy days fly past, and Penelope, busily plying her loom and weaving into many a priceless garment the stories of the older time, as she had been wont to do under the eye of Leda, her aunt, in Lacedaemon, found nothing to desire in her grateful heart, but yet more was added to her, for before the year was ended a son was born to her, whom his father, in the vain hope of leading a peace-

ful life perhaps, called Telemachus. As Odysseus was a true and tender son, so he now grew a loving father ; the infant who was laid in his arms by Eurykleia, his own nurse and foster-mother, seemed to him a holy gift, and as other men in grave moments recalled their fathers to kindle them to action or to give weight to their words, it came to be the habit of this grave and thoughtful prince to recall his little son, and if Odysseus said, " May I no longer be called the father of Telemachus," men knew that he was in earnest and not to be trifled with.

Happy wife and happy mother, it was well that Penelope could feed her heart with the sight of Odysseus and his little boy, and that she could store her memory with images of his love and wisdom, for on these her hungry heart must feed for many a long day of loneliness, perplexity, and sorrow.

Telemachus had now begun to know his father and to leap at the sight of him when the evil news rang through the Achæan land, that all who had taken the vow to defend Helen and her husband from wrong, were now summoned to keep it at the instance of Menelaus ; for a Trojan prince had carried away to Asia the Queen of Sparta.

To no one perhaps was the summons more unwelcome than to the son of Laertes, and as he who had proposed the vow could not shrink from keeping it, men say that he feigned madness, and when Agamemnon himself arrived, accompanied by his cousin Pala-

medes to summon him to the war, he met them in the dress of a slave and gave them no greeting, feigning forsooth to have lost his wits ; and to give more colour to the idea he got out the plough, and yoking an ox and an ass to it he drove up and down on the sea-shore, sprinkling salt in his furrows instead of wheat. Then Agamemnon was at his wit's end and would have gone away, but the crafty Palamedes contrived to steal the little Telemachus from Eurykleia, the nurse, and laid him in the furrow just in front of the plough. When Odysseus beheld his little son lying laughing on the ground, what could he do but turn the plough aside ? Then he stood still and lifting the child tenderly in his arms, he turned with a stern look to Palamedes and said :—

“Thou hast conquered me now, but have a care that thou do not give me a chance of victory over thyself.” Then he carried the boy to his mother, and laying him in her arms he said :—

“Take him, Penelope, I would fain have remained with thee and with him, but the gods have willed it otherwise. I am not the only home-loving man who am dragged away to this hateful war, and if men make oaths it is just that they abide by them. Fare thee well, beloved wife, and be sure, whatever happens that I am true to thee, and do thou care for the child and Laertes and Antikleia.”

Penelope could not speak for tears, but she hung about his neck and kissed him many times, then she

let him go, putting great strain on herself, for Agamemnon and Palamedes were looking on, and Odysseus went steadily down to the ship and clomb over its black side, and never looked back until he stood by the prow and the rowers were lifting their oars.

Having now joined the expedition, Odysseus entered into it heart and soul, and was the author of most of the counsels by which the expedition was guided; it was at his motion that an embassy was sent to Troy to demand back Helen and, if possible, obtain a peaceable solution of the difficulty, and when the crafty temper of the Asiatics made the chieftains in general shrink from the enterprise as too full of danger, he offered to bear Menelaus company, and actually did journey with him to Troy and was entertained by Antenor and obtained a hearing from the Trojans; but though they much admired his gracious speech, the Trojans could not make up their minds to give up their prize, and the two kings returned thoroughly convinced that there was nothing for it but war to the death.

Then for a season Odysseus returned to Ithake, to fit out his ships for the war, and to bid farewell to all he loved best in the world; for, dearly as he loved his kindred, his good wife, and the island which had given him birth—yea, all the more because of his love to them, he never thought of tarrying behind, but he remembered his oath, and set his hand steadfastly to the work, and was one of the first chieftains who arrived at the muster-place at Aulis.

While the Achaeans lay here weather-bound, Odysseus contrived to send messages to Penelope, and to receive tidings from her in return, but when the whole length of the blue Aegean lay between them it was only at rare intervals that Penelope heard news of her husband ; but whenever tidings of him did reach her, they were such as made her proud to be his wife. For, though one of the meanest of the kings in extent or quality of his lands, by the force of his wisdom and true-heartedness Odysseus was ever foremost in the counsels of the chiefs ; and if Achilles was first in battle, Odysseus yielded only to Nestor of Pylos in the council.

Thus, in tender thoughts of him and careful ruling of her household, in rendering to Laertes and to Antikleia sweet filial tendance, and training the young Telemachus to be worthy of his father, Penelope spent the long ten years during which the Achaeans warred about Troy. But when at length the joyful tidings came that the great city was levelled with the dust, that Priam and all his sons were slain or in captivity, the heart of the queen leapt for joy ; for now, thought she, the weary years of separation are over : Odysseus will soon pass again the threshold of his home, and the ten years will seem but as a watch in the night for the joy of the meeting.

So she hung the temples with garlands, and offered hecatombs to Zeus Soter, father of gods and men ; to Heré, who sanctifies wedlock ; and to Pallas Athene,

who most of all the deities loved and honoured Odysseus; and then she went to cheer and comfort Laertes and Antikleia, who had wearied sadly for their only son, so far away during so many years—indeed, Antikleia had wept so much that her health had suffered, and Penelope had been afraid that she should hardly save her alive to welcome her son home again.

The gods received the offerings and heard the prayers, but they did not grant them in the way in which she desired to have them granted; for the Moirae had decreed that Odysseus should win for himself a name above that of chief or king, by sufferings nobly borne, and that Penelope should be approved a true and faithful wife by much trial.

Instead of Odysseus, came evil tidings of his shipwreck and death, on hearing which Antikleia swooned, and the sudden grief broke her heart, overstrained by weary waiting, so that she never opened her eyes again, but her gentle soul passed out of the ken of those who loved her, into the shadowy house of Hades, as though drawn by the foreknowledge that to those lustreless regions the loving Odysseus must descend, before he could win his way back to Ithake, to seek counsel of the prophet Teiresias. For there indeed she did behold him, and much tender discourse they had together, and she was able to cheer him with comfortable tidings of the goodness of his wife, and of the manly promise of the young Telemachus.

When Antikleia passed away in her swoon, Laertes

was so sorrow-stricken at his double loss of son and wife that he could not endure the sight of the palace any longer, but must needs go right away to a little farm he had in the country; and there he lived a disconsolate life, with no one to bear him company but Eumelus the wise old swineherd, and the other farm-servants.

Thus left alone, a new evil assailed the wife of Odysseus. Hitherto the presence of Laertes and Antikleia, and the great fame of Odysseus had protected his wife and child; but better is a living dog than a dead lion, and when the chiefs of the neighbouring islands and of the mainland heard that the man of many counsels was no more, seeing that Penelope was still a fair woman, and Telemachus too young to bear rule over them, they began to gather to her palace to beg her to choose a second husband, and, under pretence of this, to make great cheer for themselves out of the good treasure of Odysseus, slaying his beeves and his sheep and drinking his honey-sweet wine.

Penelope feared to displease them, lest her son, alone among such stormy neighbours, should come to grief; so she put them off with subtlety from time to time, holding fast to the belief that Odysseus still lived, and would come home again.

But the hoped-for tidings did not come, and year was added to year, until Telemachus was now a stalwart youth, with the down thick upon his lip: the wooers meanwhile waxed ever more importunate, and

made themselves more and more at home in the palace.

Then, when they pressed her for an answer, and threatened to harry the land, burn the palace, and slay Telemachus if she did not speedily make her choice, Penelope hit upon a crafty device, which put them off for a time. She bade them observe how Laertes was grown so feeble that he could not be much longer upon earth, and she said it would be an eternal disgrace to him and all his royal house if, when he died, there were no choice robe to wrap him in.

"Permit me," she said, "to design and weave in peace for him a suitable robe, and if the noble Odysseus be not returned by the time it is wrought, or tidings received of him, then we will talk of what ye desire."

"Men come not back from the house of Hades, and the hands of Penelope are deft and swift," said Eurubates, one of the wooers; "only when the web is woven, let her take heed that she keep her faith, lest we mingle her and the boy Telemachus with the ashes of the burning palace."

So Penelope wrought at her web—a lovely work, into which she wove delicate patterns and histories of heroes who had passed away, and the wooers saw the web and marvelled at its beauty; but the skilled fingers of the queen seemed to have lost their swiftness. Weeping and waiting for tidings do not speed work any more than they preserve beauty: and though all

the world knew that Odysseus was at the bottom of the sea, the foolish queen would believe that he was still alive, and would spend the nights in weeping for him, as though she were a young bride, not a twenty years' widow.

One of the attendants of Penelope heard the wooers thus wondering among themselves at her loss of skill, and indignant at the slighting mention of her mistress, she exclaimed :

"Nay, it is not the hands of Penelope that have lost their speed—they are swift as ever to obey her will ; but ye are dull, and know not that the work does not grow because she will none of you. Had the winding-sheet been for you and all who misuse the house of Odysseus, to wrap you in your last sleep, it would have been finished long ago !"

So spake the foolish damsel, and the wooer to whom she spoke seized her roughly, and would not let her go until she told him how Penelope spent half the night in unravelling the work which she had wrought in the day.

Then the wooers were very wroth, and threatened terrible things to the queen for the trick she had played them ; and Penelope, fearing for her son, gave them fair words, and was content if she could put them off from day to day, and at this time she seldom left the house, but spent her days for the most part in the upper chambers with her women, thus avoiding the insolent importunity of the wooers.

But Telemachus was now grown to be a man, and Athene, who loved him as she loved his father, put it into his heart to leave his native land, where the arrogance of the wooers and the waste of the house tortured him, and to go to his father's friends and comrades in search of news of him, for the wooers only mocked at him when he remonstrated with them; but he did not bid his mother farewell, for he well knew that she would never consent to have him part from her.

And indeed when Penelope learnt that Telemachus was gone, her heart seemed nigh to break, for it seemed to her that the cruel sea which kept Odysseus so long from his home, if it had not swallowed him up, would rob her of her son also, and she would never look upon his face again. In vain Eurykleia, the nurse, who had been in the confidence of Telemachus, assured her that he was but gone to Pylos and to Sparta, and that he would speedily return.

Telemachus had not been long gone, when Medon the herald, a faithful retainer of Odysseus, came to her in great trouble to tell her that the wooers were plotting to waylay Telemachus on his return homewards, to seize his ship and murder him. Then the poor queen fairly broke down, for what could she do there in her upper chamber among her women to defeat the wiles of the boisterous revellers below? and flinging herself on the floor of her chamber she bewailed her son as though he were already dead, and

her women mourned with her. Then in her extremity she bethought her of the aged Laertes dwelling away in the country, and she bade them summon Dolius, an aged slave, whom she had brought with her from Lacedaemon, and who had charge of her orchard, that she might send him to Laertes to acquaint him with the danger threatening the one hope of his house, and entreat him to come to the city to save him.

But Eurykleia bade her take comfort and spare the age and weakness of Laertes, whose tenderness of heart she well knew, and rather appeal to the divine Athene, daughter of Zeus, for counsel and protection ; for she knew neither age nor weakness, but was both able and willing to help all of the household of Odysseus. At these wise words of the old nurse Penelope was greatly cheered, and drying her tears she arrayed herself and her women in white sacrificial robes, and ascending to the uppermost chamber of the palace, where there was nothing between her and the pure heaven, she offered up her barley-cakes, and poured out her soul in prayer to the daughter of aegis-bearing Zeus, the invincible.

Then Athene sent peace into the heart of Penelope, and a sweet sleep came upon her when the night fell, and a vision appeared to her of her dear sister Iphigenia, who was wedded to Eumelus, in Lakonia, and whose living face she had never seen since she went on board ship with Odysseus as his wife : but to the sense of the sleeping queen it seemed no way strange, only in-

finitely sweet to see again her old playfellow, and to hear from her lips words of comfort and assurance ; she only vaguely wondered how in this season of agony and despair it had come about, that her sister, whom she had so often vainly desired to see, should be there familiarly in her chamber with her ; and when the sleep left her, and she awoke, the queen knew that it was no one but the gracious Athene herself who had spoken to her under the form of the woman whom she loved best upon earth ; and she went for many days in the strength of that comfort, knowing that Telemachus was safe in the protection of his beneficent patroness. While she communed with the vision, Penelope would fain have gathered tidings of Odysseus also ; but here the goddess was mute, for the gods who lived for ever had willed that his faith should be made perfect by suffering, hers by patience.

Before very many days were past Telemachus returned from his journey, with no tidings of his father's whereabouts indeed, but much to think about, for he had visited the aged Nestor in Pylos, and by his advice had extended his travels to Lacedaemon, where he had beheld and been entertained by Menelaus and Helene in their palace, rich with the treasure of many lands, so that the riot and the licence that degraded his father's halls seemed to him all the more horrible ; and, indeed, during his absence matters had waxed rapidly worse, for the wooers had grown more daring, and the women servants, who should have taken ex-

ample by their mistress and held aloof, had joined themselves to the rioters; so that the house of Odysseus was become a scene of the lowest riot and waste.

Now Telemachus was but newly returned, when it chanced that Eumæus, the faithful slave and swine-herd, came from the farm where Laertes abode, bringing with him an aged beggar with worn features and tattered garments; and going to the queen, he told her of other things which imported her to know, and of the stranger, whom he had entertained for three days, and who had travelled much and in many lands.

"Call him to me at once," said Penelope; "haply he may give me tidings of Odysseus."

"He hath indeed many and precious tidings of him, madam."

"O! then bring him hither at once, for if he tell me true tidings of my lord, coat and cloak, and all he stands in need of, these hands shall amply yield him."

Then Eumæus hastened to the stranger, who sat in the hall at the door, and would have him at once to the queen; but he excused himself, begging her to wait until the evening, for he feared the violence of the wooers.

Hardly was Eumæus gone back to the queen, when there came swaggering into the hall, Irus, the licensed beggar of the palace, who finding the stranger in his place was very wroth, as if forsooth his rights were invaded; and the wooers, keen for any sport, at

once bade the beggars fight for the place, promising a roasted breast of goat to him who should prove himself the better man ; and they, nothing loth, prepared to try their strength. But when the stranger stripped off his ragged garments, he showed a body so white and comely, and such thews that all men wondered ; nor was their amazement lessened when he smote Irus so sore with his fist that he broke his jawbone ; and seizing him by the leg, dragged him out into the courtyard, and left him there as the scum and curse of men.

Then returning to the hall he begged for food and alms, and Telemachus treated him with kindly respect, as aged and a stranger, and some of the chiefs gave him contemptuous bounty, which cost them little, seeing that they fed at another man's table ; but Antinous, the haughtiest and fiercest among them, taunted him, and snatching up the stool on which his feet rested, flung it at the old man, and smote him heavily on the right shoulder.

The queen hearing of this ill-usage to an aged man, a traveller and a guest, was much moved, and calling her women, she went down herself to the hall to chide Telemachus for the discourteous and unmanly treatment to which the stranger had been subjected ; and she looked so noble and so lovely in her royal zeal for the honour of her house, that while Telemachus replied and told her of the manly bearing of the stranger in his struggle with Irus, her queenly beauty so smote the eyes of the princes that they forgot all else in gazing at

her, and Eurymachus could not hold his peace, but broke out into lavish praises of her beauty and perfections.

"Alas !" she said, "such praises give me no pleasure, they only call to my mind my absent lord, for whom alone I would be fair; but he in his wisdom foresaw the calamities that have since overwhelmed him and me, and left me the charge of those who were dearest to him, his father, his mother, and his son. 'And if I come not back,' he said, 'when Telemachus is grown to be a man and can take charge of his own household, then choose thee another mate, whomsoever thou wilt.' Such was the parting charge of Odysseus, and it is my desire to conform myself in all things to his will, and to free his house and Telemachus his son from the riotous waste of these days. So though second nuptials are as distasteful to me as they must be to every worthy woman, I fear me I must obey my lord, even in this respect. But surely it was never seen before that men who wooed an honourable and wealthy lady should look to her to entertain them with her sheep and beeves, but they should rather entertain her and her friends and ply her with costly gifts besides."

"Gifts, madam, we will freely give thee," said Antinous; "but know that we are resolved not to quit thine house until thou choose one among us, whomsoever thou dost prefer, to be thine husband."

Then they sent and fetched costly gifts, and the

herald bore them to the queen: from Antinous a robe exceeding beautiful, with twelve clasps of solid gold to fasten it; from Eurymachus a golden tablet richly chased with figures and set in a frame of amber. Eurydamus sent a pair of earrings, in the hollows of which were radiant pearls; each wooer sent his own gift, the choicest treasure that was laid up in his house; but Penelope received them all and retired to her chamber, her women bearing them after her. And she being withdrawn, the wooers fell at once to their accustomed sports of dancing and revelry.

But when the night was now fairly come and the wooers had retired to their houses, supper was served to the queen in the hall, whither she came to enjoy the heat of the fire. In the hall the beggar still abode, all the rest being parted; and Melantho, one of the women, who had given too much heed to Eurymachus, though she should have known better, seeing that she was the daughter of Dolius, the queen's gardener, and had been daintily bred and much cared for by the queen, roughly chid the old man and bade him not tarry there to see what ladies do, but go at once out of doors lest he should be singed with firebrands. But the stranger chid her, and bade her remember how fickle fortune is, and how if she brought discredit on the house of Odysseus by insulting his guest, Odysseus might himself call her to account; or if Odysseus were really gone, Telemachus would demand satisfaction from her.

Penelope, hearing the dispute, upbraided Melanthe for her saucy frowardness, and bade her woman Eurynome place a stool close beside her chair, and bring the stranger that she might question him privately touching any knowledge he might have of her dear lord.

The stranger, much urged by the queen, told her that he was a younger brother of Idomeneus, king of Crete, and that Odysseus on his way to Ilion had been driven into Crete by stress of weather, at which time he abode for three days in his house as a guest, and he told her so much of the sayings and doings of Odysseus that she burst into an uncontrollable passion of weeping; yet wishing to be quite sure that the stranger was not deceiving her, she said :

“Since he abode so many days as thy guest, thou canst tell me what kind of man he was to look at, what weeds he wore, and whom of his followers he trusted most.” *

“Alas!” replied the guest, “it is now twenty long years since Odysseus abode with me, and I doubt whether I can trust my memory; yet methinks his dress was this: A double purple robe closed with a golden clasp, with a facing of many colours. On the skirts of the robe a hound was pursuing a spotted hind, most admirably wrought; beneath this robe was an under garment of marvellous beauty, thin as any dry onion skin, soft, and glistening like the sun, so that every woman who saw it was lost in admiration

of it. As to his size and appearance, methinks he was about my height, and the principal attendant who lives in my memory was his herald, a swarthy man somewhat older than Odysseus and much trusted by him, and his name was Eurybates." •

The queen hearing all these details about her lord, and especially the description of the weeds which she had given him at parting, wept yet more tenderly, and feeling sure that the stranger was a true man, she declared that henceforth he should be her guest-friend, and should receive at her hands all that he needed.

Then the stranger bade her take comfort and look for the speedy return of her lord, for he assured her that he had tidings from the Thesprotians, among whom he had lately sojourned, that Odysseus was alive and would speedily be home; that he had indeed lost all his men by the wrath of Helios, whose sacred oxen they had devoured in spite of his warning, and had been wrecked and cast ashore on the fair island of Scheria, where the Phaeacians dwell; these kindly folks had made him royally welcome, in spite of his destitute state, and sent him on his way with rich presents. He might therefore be looked for at any moment, for he had only gone to take the sense of the oracle at Dodona, as to whether he should return publicly and in state, or come home secretly and in disguise. "So, madam, be very sure that Odysseus will possess his own within the year, and that before the month be out he will be here alive."

The queen, overjoyed at this glad news, could not make enough of the stranger: she bade her women prepare a costly couch whereon he might repose, and get water for his feet, and bathe them for him. But the stranger would, on no account accept the services of the saucy damsels whom he had seen on too familiar terms with the wooers; "but if," he said, "there be any aged woman, who is not afraid of work, and who has learnt to show old men fitting reverence, from her I will gladly accept such a kindly office."

Then Penelope called Eurykleia the nurse, who having finished her nightly tendance on her beloved Telemachus, now sat dozing by the fire, and told her to wash the feet of the stranger, bidding her observe that he was of about the same age as Odysseus, and that his hands and feet were shaped like to his.

Eurykleia at the bare mention of the name of Odysseus began to weep, but she bestirred herself to do the queen's bidding, bewailing the while her lost nursling. When she had poured the water into the basin, she took the dusty and travel-worn feet of the stranger and began to chafe them tenderly, pouring the water over them; but as she handled them, all at once she uttered a cry of joy and surprise, and looking up into his face she took him by the chin, exclaiming, "O my child! thou art Odysseus, thou canst be no other."

And it was indeed the long absent, much desired lord, who had come to his house in this poor guise, and the old nurse Eurykleia knew him by the scar of a deep

wound which he had received when a lad from a wild boar. Odysseus finding himself discovered, hastily bade the old woman restrain herself; for the queen, who had sunk into a train of thoughts suggested by the tidings she had heard, paid no heed to the stranger and Eurykleia, so the nurse was able to control her emotion after the first outburst, and obey the command of her lord not to betray him, even to his queen.

The wooers having now made their nuptial offerings to the queen, expected that she should name some one from among them whom she would take as her husband; and Penelope, aware of this, and that if thwarted they would probably break out into some violence, once more met them with subtlety, for she declared that she would take him as her husband who could draw the bow of Odysseus, and send an arrow through twelve p^oleaxes placed at equal distances. The wooers readily accepted the test, for they had a very good opinion of their own strength and skill, and Penelope went herself to fetch the bow and quiver, which still hung in her treasure-chamber where Odysseus himself had hung them, above the presses richly stored with perfumed garments. They were the gift of Iphitus, the Argonaut, to Odysseus when a youth, and much valued by him. When Penelope beheld the bow hanging where Odysseus had himself hung it up, she wept, and taking it down tenderly, bore it in her own hands to the great hall, where the wooers were feasting. Then she gave it to

Eumaeus, the swine-herd, and bade him deliver it to them.

At the sight of the stout bow all the wooers were aghast, for well they guessed they lacked both strength and craft to bend that mighty bow. Then Telemachus, to give them heart, rose from his seat and took the bow in his hand, and essayed to bend it, but all to no purpose, and he sat down again, confessing that he was either inferior to his father in strength and skill, or that his sinews were not yet firmly enough knit to fit him for the task.

Then Antinous bade his pages light a great fire and rub the bow with fat to make it lissom, but when they had rubbed it until they were weary, it was all the same. No one could span it, but each in turn withdrew from the task exhausted and dispirited.

"Nay," said Antinous when now there was a pause, and no one came forward to take the bow, "wist ye not that this is the feast of Helios, and a day to be kept holy? That is, doubtless, why we cannot bend the bow. Let us lay it aside until the morrow, and in the morning offer a solemn sacrifice to the god, the patron of bows and of archers, and then essay this task."

Then, to the amazement of all, the strange beggar came forward and craved to be permitted to try his chance, that he might see whether he still retained his ancient strength, or whether his many and painful wanderings had impaired his force. At this Antinous was very wroth, and bade the beggar keep his place

if he valued the safety of his carcase. But the queen herself came forward and bade them take heed, as the very poorest guest whom Telemachus chose to entertain was deserving of their respect and courtesy.

"Surely, madam," cried Eurymachus, "it would be a fine story if a wandering beggar came and drew the bow which not one of the princes could draw—a shame and an indignity which none of them could survive."

"As to the stranger," said the queen, "it ill becomes you to speak slightly of him, seeing that he is well born and well made. Give him the bow, I charge ye; and if he succeed in spanning it, I hereby promise him that he shall be well supplied with food and raiment, guarded from harm and insult, and sped on his way whithersoever he would go."

"Nay," said Telemachus, who saw that the wooers were growing angry, and that there was like to be wild work ere long, "am not I the son of Odysseus, and doth not this bow and all that he had belong to me of absolute right, and is it not mine to give or to withhold? Retire, thou, madam, with thy women, and tend thy loom and ply thy distaff, but leave the bow of my father to my care."

The queen gazed with wonder at Telemachus, for he had suddenly assumed the bearing and the speech of a man, and rejoicing inwardly in her heart, as mothers do rejoice when they can look for comfort and protection to their sons, she withdrew to

her chamber, and there sat sweetly musing, as was her wont, on her absent lord, for to him always her true heart turned, until Pallas Athene, who had her at this time in her special care, poured deep sleep on her eyelids, and she lay in dreamless repose until she was roused by the voice of Eurykleia, bidding her wake and come down to welcome home her lord, Odysseus, who was once more at home, and who, while she slept, had freed the house of all the rabble rout that vexed it so long.

"Shame on thee, woman!" said the queen, who was yet scarce awake, and who could not credit such great news; "is it not enough that thou hast wakened me out of a sleep so sweet and deep as I have not enjoyed these twenty years, but thou must add to the sorrow I must needs bear by telling of a joy that might have been?"

"Nay, madam," said Eurykleia, kindly, "it is in very truth my royal lord and foster-son who is come home again, and there is nothing now to cause thee fear, for thou thyself hast seen and spoken with him; and all the wooers, who tortured thee and vexed the house, are slain, and it is no other than that poor guest to whom thou wert so royally gracious, and whom the wooers in their arrogance insulted."

Then the queen was convinced, and she joyously sprang up and embracing Eurykleia, overwhelmed her with questions, which the good old nurse joyfully answered, telling her how she had been summoned by

Telemachus, when the wooers were all slain by the terrible bow of Odysseus, to assist in clearing and cleansing the hall. And when she entered she beheld the king standing in the midst of the slain princes, who were heaped up like a wall about him, looking like a lion, and smeared with blood and dust. But now the carcasses had been borne out into the fore-court, where they lay piled one on another, and Odysseus was busy with such of the maids as had not suffered with their lives for their misconduct, in cleansing the hall with fire and sulphur, and he desired that Penelope would descend and come to welcome him.

Then Penelope's heart again misgave her; what if it were not Odysseus after all, but some god who, indignant at the insolence of the wooers, had assumed his form to punish them, and the real Odysseus were indeed dead.

"Nay, madam, be sure it is my lord himself and no spirit. Did I not know him by the scar on his leg from the tusk of the wild boar, when I bathed his feet yester-even? yea, and I cried out and would have told thee then but that he bade me hold my peace if I valued his life."

Then the queen delayed no longer but went down into the great hall. When she came thither Odysseus sat on a settle by the fire and never looked up at her entrance, waiting until she should know him; but she, still doubtful whether it were indeed her very lord, spoke no word, but went and sat down opposite to

him, and could not be sure whether it were himself, for wear of time and the change wrought in his appearance made her hesitate.

Then Telemachus lost patience, and reproached her as ungentle and unkind to give her husband no word of welcome after his infinite toils and wanderings.

But the queen replied that she was so amazed that she could not speak, nor did she feel that she could trust her own judgment so as to know whether this were indeed Odysseus; "but if it be really himself," she said, "there are tokens by which I may know him."

At this Odysseus burst into a laugh, and said with some bitterness, "That his poor apparel doubtless made her doubt whether such a loathed creature could be the lord whose memory she had so dearly loved. But now there is no time to think of signs and tokens, for behold we have slain all the choice nobility of this and the neighbour isles, and we must consider how we may confirm our victory, for surely the people will demand of us an account of this night's work. Therefore let us bathe and clothe ourselves with fresh attire and fill the air with minstrelsy and dancing, that the people may not guess what has befallen until I can bring my father, Laertes, from the country to sanction me with his presence."

Then Telemachus and Eumæus gladly did as Odysseus advised, and when the king had bathed and put on his royal garments Athene herself breathed upon

him a divine lustre ; but the queen still hesitated, nor would she be moved by his comely presence any more than by his low estate. "It is not my way," she said, "to be taken by the valour of men, nor to slight men in the humblest condition. But at least this stranger has done us good service and deserves courteous entertainment ; fetch the bed which stands in our bridal chamber and spread it royally."

Odysseus well knew the richly carved and ornamented bed which his own hands had fashioned, and he flushed indignantly at these words of the queen.

"How can they fetch it hither, thou knowest well that it is built into the alcove, and cannot be moved out of it but by levers."

Then Penelope knew beyond question that this was indeed her own lord come home again, and she ran to him and flinging her arms about his neck, and kissing him many times in a passion of love, excused her hesitation by the lapse of time and the terrible consequences of a mistake. "If Argive Helen," she said, "had only been less ready to hearken to a stranger, what woe and mischief had been spared, but now I know that thou art my very lord himself, for no one but thou and I and Eurykleia have ever beheld the secret of that bed."

Thus the faithful wife was rewarded for her weary waiting ; the trials of Odysseus were now soon ended, for Athene enabled him to conciliate the relations of

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the slain chieftains who came in wrath to avenge them, and for many years he dwelt happily with his wife in his native Ithake, and wherever good and faithful wives are spoken of, Penelope, daughter of Ikarius, will be pre-eminent.



IPHIGENEIA.

A G A M E M N O N, son of Atreus, king of men, raised above his brother kings to the proud supremacy of the host assembled at Aulis to chastise the traitor Paris and recover the lost wife of Menelaus, thought little of his own sins ; least of all of that day when in his impetuous haste he pursued the lovely white hind into the very grove of Artemis and slew her at the foot of the statue of the goddess. He had forgotten how the goddess there, stone though men thought her, trembled with wrath at the outrage, and raised her lance to slay him, and how he, white and terror-stricken, fell on his face and prayed for mercy and promised to offer in place of the slain hind the fairest creature that should be born that year. But the gods never forget, and when men are strongest in their self-righteous condemnation of others, some buried sin is kindled into life and fiercely calls for punishment.

A death-like calm lay on the waters at Aulis, and

princes and men hung in listless despair about the beach, and at length, much urged, the prophet Kalchas spake :—

“The waters are becalmed by the will of Artemis, whom Agamemnon, king of men, hath defrauded of her due ; nor will any wind of heaven ruffle the sea or fill our white sails until the victim, promised by the king, lies before the altar of the goddess.”

Then Agamemnon trembled, and his ruddy cheek grew pale as ivory which has been worn by the hands of men, and his voice was low and tremulous as he said :—

“Hecatombs of heifers and lambs have fallen in my city of Argos to the dread goddess, what would she have more ? ”

“She cares not for hecatombs of heifers or of lambs,” exclaimed the seer ; “she requires the accomplishment of thy vow, O king.”

“My yow, what vow ? ” asked Agamemnon, with tremulous lips.

“When the bleeding hind lay dying at her feet and the outraged goddess was about to slay thee, thou didst promise her the fairest creature that should be born that year for her very own.”

“And did she not receive it ? ” faltered the king.

“Thou knowest that she did not, for what creature of earth or air, born that year, could compare with Iphigeneia, thine own daughter ? ”

Agamemnon groaned and hid his face : too well he

knew that his beautiful and richly-gifted child was far the most excellent creature that had come to this dull earth in that year; but to yield her up, her who had honoured his banquets with her sweet voice, who of all his children loved him most, to be slain like a mere beast at the altar—O better to die a thousand deaths, better to face the lightning and the thunder or to be swallowed up quick into the centre of the earth! So the council broke up and nothing was done, and the weary days dragged on; then Menelaus and Odysseus remonstrated with Agamemnon and pointed out to him that for the sake of his own feelings he was ruining the lives of many thousands of brave men and delaying the accomplishment of their vow, and they wrested from the king a sort of permission to bring the maid if they could by subtlety to the camp: he thought no doubt that Klytaemnestra, her mother, would refuse to let her go, and to make more certain, he sent away a messenger to his queen to bid her beware of treachery and by no means to let the maiden go; but this messenger Menelaus met on the road and took his missive from him, and going to the king upbraided him roundly for his want of faith.

And so Odysseus and Diomedes went to Argos and bade the queen send back with them the noble Iphigeneia, that she might be wedded to Achilles, the son of silver-footed Thetis; and Klytaemnestra, well pleased at such a bridegroom for her beloved child, would not

send her, but took her herself in her chariot with her son, the little Orestes, to Aulis.

Iphigeneia once there, the cruel plot was quickly unravelled, and the noble son of Peleus, the unconscious bridegroom of the maiden, was very wroth, and though he had never cast a thought upon her, he bravely promised to stand by her, and not permit her to be handed over to the cruel priests. And Agamemnon himself could not give her up; better let Helene die in yonder foreign city—better let Zeus, incensed at his thwarted designs, send him to the house of Hades than that the child should be slain. Iphigeneia is richly worth the world to him; no need of her soft arms about his neck, no need of those piteous cries for mercy, piercing his ears. Iphigeneia shall be saved. Artemis demands in vain. The king must hide his face from his people; he cannot give for them the life of his child.

Then the gods suddenly put it into the heart of Iphigeneia to consider what a choice of fame was before her. Kalchas, the prophet, who knew the present, the past, and the future, had declared that her life was necessary to the welfare of the host; that until she were surrendered no favourable gale should swell the Achaean sails—that the ten thousand ships, with all their costly weight of warriors, should lie spell-bound at Aulis. What man was there in all the army who was not ready to give his life for the common good? what chieftain who was not leaving home and

friends, often loved wife and little children, that the will of the eternal gods might be done, and that men might learn to know and do the right? And this same blameless son of Peleus, this Achilles, with his lustrous curls and beautiful manhood, whose bride she would have been well content to be, was it not rumoured that to him a choice had been given of a life drawn out to the extremest space of years allotted to man, in quiet peace and homely comfort, or of a few brilliant years, cut short by a violent death, and that he had chosen to die in the flower of his age, so that he might leave a name which should kindle the sympathies of men wherever the language of his country was spoken? Peace and comfort had seemed contemptible to him in comparison with glory, and should she choose less nobly? If he had chosen the quiet walks of life, no evil would have resulted from it, which would have checked the national life of Achaea; but if she fled with her father, they might hide themselves from the very thunderbolts of Zeus, but what could dull their ears to the curses of the indignant people, or blind their eyes to the ruined purpose of that mighty host?

Then a divine joy filled the breast of the maiden; death seemed to her no longer terrible, but a crown of honour to be dearly sought for. She lifted her head, which she had hidden on her father's breast, and bravely drew herself from his arms, and demanded as a right the death from which she had hitherto shrunk

with terror ; then gathering the maidens of Aulis about her, she placed the sacrificial garland on her brows and walked with steadfast feet to the grove of Artemis, where the priests awaited her.

Who can tell of that scene of woe, of the father with bowed head hidden in his gown, of the maiden so noble and so lovely that the stern priest could not plunge the knife into her bosom until he had flung a veil over her head, and so quenched the light of her glorious eyes, and all the silent awe-struck chiefs, who held their breath and fixed their eyes on the ground, unable to behold death under this new aspect ? Then the voice of the hoary priest rung out slow and clear, as with one hand on the head of the victim he raised the other towards heaven :—

“ To thee, O daughter of Latoné, delighting in the bow, to thee, pure maid, I devote this pure maid a sacrifice, worthy of thee, vowed to thee from her birth ! Accept this victim, O goddess ; be propitious to this wind-bound Achæan host, and bring us safe, with swelling sails, to wide-wayed Troy, which the Fates have willed that we should level with the dust ! ”

So prayed the priest, and ere the sound of his voice had died away, the knife had descended and was raised again red with blood. A groan burst from the spectators, and the eyes that had been bent on the ground, turned as with one consent to the spot where Iphigeneia had stood. No longer stood she there, but on the pavement at the altar's foot, crushed and weltering

in blood, lay—not the royal maiden in her delicate nuptial robes, but a white fawn with tender eyes and quivering limbs.

A sigh of amazement and of relief broke from the ring of chiefs, and with one impulse they started forward to gaze more nearly at the wonder, but the priest raised his hand to warn them back, and turning to the king, who still stood with bowed head hidden in his mantle—"Behold!" he said, "O son of Atreus—behold the wonders of the goddess!"

At these words Agamemnon slowly raised his head, and turned his woebegone face towards the priest, but when he beheld the hind, "Where, then," he said, "is the noble Iphigeneia?"

"The goddess had her," said the priest, solemnly. "Thy vow is paid. Fear not; even now I hear the sighing of the rising wind. Go, bid the mariners set up the masts and the white sails. Even now while we speak the favourable wind is blowing."

Then all was joyful movement throughout the host, and by the dawn of morning the dancing waves of the blue Aegean bore the armament on its happy way to Troy.

Meanwhile the maiden Iphigeneia, snatched from the sacrificial knife by the mighty arm of Artemis, was carried in the chariot of the goddess, rapt in deep sleep, far beyond the straits of Helle, through the blue *Clashers* to a temple which she had among the Thracians on the Tauric Chersonese. There, when the

maid awoke her mind was so bewildered that she knew not whether the knife which she had felt at her throat had not indeed set her spirit free, and she were not already among the departed in the hollow of the earth, or whether this gloomy vaulted roof and these cold skies were not some strange region of the living earth to which she had been borne.

Then a grave and noble lady, wearing the dress and fillets of a priestess, comforted her, telling her that she was still indeed a living woman upon the natural earth, and that the gracious Artemis, to whom she had been vowed from her birth, willed that she should here attend her shrine and become herself in due course high priestess of this temple, which was specially sacred, seeing that it was honoured by the presence of an image of the goddess which had been sent direct from Zeus.

The heart of the young Iphigeneia rejoiced to be still among the living, and she broke into grateful adoration of the goddess whose mercy had saved her, and in her chastened mood she was well content to spend her days in learning from the priestess all the duties of her office. So that as years went on she grew into a grave and stately woman, revered by all the fierce men of that stormy clime, from Thoas the king, to the meanest swineherd on his lands. And when the high priestess passed into eternal night, it was Iphigeneia who wore her fillets, and who hung the shrine with garlands, and offered the daily sacrifice at the

altar. But as the years passed away, and Iphigeneia was now in the perfection of her mature womanhood, there grew upon her a mighty longing for her own home and people, and for those finer manners which the Immortals had taught to the Achæan race ; and in the long and silent hours, when the women, her attendants, plied the loom, working rich garments for the goddess and costly hangings for the temple, Iphigeneia wandered back in thought to the home of her childhood, to the king, her father, with his Jove-like brows and ample chest, to her mother and sisters, and to the little Orestes with his rosy cheeks and clustering curls. O ! where were they ? how did they look ? what were they doing ? should she ever see them again, or the blue Aegean, or the marble halls of Argos ?

Now there was a cruel custom among the Thracians, cruel and inhospitable, to offer as a sacrifice to Artemis any poor soul cast by the sea upon the peninsula, or landing there unawares. Hitherto it had been Iphigeneia's happy lot to escape the execution of this law, for no stranger had come or been driven to that cold and comfortless shore ; but one morning when she had risen from a couch troubled by dreams of evil to her brother, she was summoned to receive the report of a countryman who came in haste to announce to her that two youths of very comely presence had landed on the coast.

Now when the countryman arrived, Iphigeneia, con-

cluding from her evil dream that Orestes had perished, was preparing offerings of honey and of milk to his spirit; but at these tidings a strange joy filled her heart. Had not the gods sent this costly sacrifice to do him honour, two comely youths to bear his spirit company to the fields of the blessed? She had never before contemplated the ghastly rite but with horror, but if Orestes were dead, why should other youths prosper? It was fitting that all that was beautiful and happy should bear him company. So she gave the word, and the ministers of the temple went down in haste to the shore to secure the youths, who were sleeping under the shadow of the rocks, after their rough sea travel. But when they stood before her, guarded and bound, a divine pity took possession of her soul, and she wept to think of the mother who bore them, of their father or perhaps sister about to be bereaved of such noble youths by the cruel law of Artemis, and she bade the attendants loose their hands, seeing that they were sacred to the goddess, and in a voice broken with compassion, she asked them whence they came. "Weep not for us, lady," said the elder and taller of the youths, "if thou hast compassion on us, seeing that we must die, and it becomes those who are appointed to die to be steadfast, and not to weaken their resolution by tender thoughts or sights."

Now the countryman had told Iphigeneia that the stranger who seemed tossed and troubled in his mind

addressed his companion as Pylades, and she now desired to know which of them was so named. "I am so called, lady," said he who had first spoken, but when the priestess desired to know of the other how he was named, he declined to answer, preferring to die unknown, that so his enemies might not triumph in his untimely fate ; but when she importuned him to tell her whence he came, he said he was from Argos.

At the mention of her beloved native town, Iphigeneia trembled, and grew now pale, now rosy red ; so moved was she to hear once more her native Argive tongue and see before her one born within the happy walls of that far-off city, and she asked him of Troy, if it were true that it had fallen, of Helene, of Achilles—so that the strangers marvelled who this stately priestess might be who was so well informed of what was of most interest in their own Achaean land.

"And tell me," said she, growing more eager, "tell me of the royal Agamemnon and of his fortune."

At the mention of the name of Agamemnon, the stranger trembled and turned pale as ivory and bade her ask of some other, but she entreated him in the name of all the gods to tell her of his condition.

"Alas ! he is dead—Agamemnon the king is fallen—slain in his own house, returning from the war, slain by the hand of Klytaemnestra."

"Alas !" cried Iphigeneia, catching with breathless horror the broken sentences of the stranger, "alas ! worthy of all tears, both she who slew and he who

died ; but tell me, thou who knowest so well these terrible events, lives the wife of the ill-fated king ? ”

“ She lives no longer ! ” exclaimed the stranger ; “ the son she bore, he slew her. ”

“ O miserable house ! ” exclaimed Iphigeneia, utterly confounded ; “ but surely by misadventure ? ”

“ By misadventure surely, ” replied the stranger, “ but not without design ; he was appointed by Phoebus to avenge his father. ”

“ Did Agamemnon leave no child then save Orestes ? ”

“ Yes, his daughters Elektra and Chrysothemis. ”

“ How ! ” said the priestess, “ is no account made of Iphigeneia ? ”

“ She is long since dead, ” replied the stranger, “ and no longer sees the light. ”

“ And lives the noble Orestes still ? or is he also dead in Argos. ”

“ He lives, lady, though he is a wanderer upon earth. ”

Thus relieved of the anxiety into which her dream had cast her on behalf of her brother, she told the stranger that if he would carry a message for her to her friends in Argos she would save him alive, and contrive his escape from that dread shore.

The stranger refused to accept this deliverance for himself, but he promised that Pylades, who was here only on account of his friendship to him, should execute her commission for her.

Then Iphigeneia went to seek a scroll which she had prepared for such an occasion, and while she was gone the two youths took a tender farewell of each other. Presently Iphigeneia returned, and with many solemn words delivered her scroll into the hands of Pylades, requiring him to take an oath that he would certainly give it into the hands of him to whom it was addressed.

Pylades swore by Zeus, the king of heaven: "but how," said he, "if the ship be wrecked and the scroll washed away by the sea, and I only escape with my life?"

"In case such a mischance should befall," said Iphigeneia, "I will tell thee what is written in the scroll that thou mayst report it to my friends. The message is to Orestes, the son of Agamemnon. Tell him that she who was slain in Aulis, Iphigeneia, so long believed to be dead, still lives, and bids him as her dear brother fetch her home to Argos, that she may not die here in this cruel land. And if he disregard thy words, tell this same Orestes, son of Agamemnon, that she will bring a curse on him and his for ever. Take the letter, and remember what I have told thee."

"The oath I have sworn is easily redeemed," said Pylades, taking the scroll, and handing it to his friend, "for here I deliver to thee, Orestes, the letter of thy sister."

Then Orestes, for he indeed it was, flung his arms in transport about his sister, and she was so amazed that she could not believe that it was her own brother,

Orestes, whom she had last seen a little child in his nurse's arms, grown into so noble and princely a man. But when he talked to her of their home, of the history of their race, and especially of the delicate web into which she had woven the quarrel of Atreus, their great ancestor, with Thyestes his brother, for the golden ram, she knew that it must indeed be he, and she could not sufficiently delight in talking to and in gazing at him.

When their rapture had a little subsided the terrible circumstances in which they stood came back upon their minds, and Iphigeneia demanded in her trouble what had brought them to this inhospitable land.

Then Orestes related to her how the Eumenides had tortured him on account of the slaughter of his mother, and how Phoebus, by whose command he had done the deed, had stood his friend, and bade him go to Athens to plead his cause against the dread goddesses on the hill of Ares before the invincible Athenas. There Phoebus still was his friend, for he claimed the deed as his own, and Pallas Athene declared him guiltless; nevertheless the agony of mind did not leave Orestes until he sunk exhausted at the shrine of Delphi, entreating Phoebus to slay him or to accomplish his deliverance.

Then there came a voice from the golden tripod which bade him go to Tauris, possess himself of the image of Artemis, which had fallen from heaven, and convey it to Athens; for so only could the gods be completely appeased.

When Iphigeneia heard this she saw that on her craft and courage depended not only her own chance of escape from Tauris, but the lives of her brother and cousin, endangered for Orestes' sake. But as all the people were excited by the expectation of the coming sacrifice, it was impossible for them to steal away unobserved; she therefore sent for Thoas, the king, and told him that she had just become acquainted with the fact that one of the youths, being guilty of blood-shedding, was unfit for sacrifice, and that she must take him down to the sea-shore, there to perform over him certain rites which would insure his purification.

"Do thou therefore, O king, warn the people by solemn proclamation to keep aloof, and on no account to mar the effect of the rites by curious looks, seeing that the guilty man hath laid his hands upon the very statue of the goddess, and if it be not instantly purified by sea water and by solemn and secret rites, which no one but myself can discharge, terrible plagues will light on thee and on all thy people."

Thoas heard with submission the commands of the revered priestess and hastened to obey them, and to forbid any one on pain of death to follow or to watch her. So the youths were led by the ministers of the temple down to the sea, and Iphigeneia followed slowly, bearing reverently in her hands the image of the goddess. But when they reached the sands and the headland behind which the ship of

Orestes lay hidden, there was no question of rite or lustral water, but the two princes broke from the priests who held them and leapt on board their ship, dragging Iphigeneia after them. Then the ministers of the temple, thinking they were doing their priestess wrong, would have attacked them and rescued her, and at their cries Thoas and his people came hurrying to the shore so that it would have gone hard with the princes, for bows were bent and spears aimed at them, had not Athene herself appeared and commanded the king to let Iphigeneia go, telling him that the stranger was Orestes, the son of Agamemnon, and that he had sought the Tauric Chersonese by the express command of Phoebus, that he might convey to the Achæan land the statue of Artemis, and his sister long thought dead. *

Then Thoas bade his people hold back, and a favourable wind filled the sails of the ship and bore them swiftly over the Euxine through the blue clashing rocks into the lovely midland sea with its wealth of shining islands. And so coasting and sailing they came to the happy land where Athene delights to dwell, and to which she has given mind and the love of freedom above all lands.

And thus Iphigeneia came once more to her own beloved land: yet she sought not to dwell again in Argos or Mycenæ, for there the graves of her father and mother, on her account filled before their time, would have made her life wretched. She bore the

image of Artemis, to whose service she had been vowed from infancy, to the temple dedicated to her at Braurôn, not far from the plain of Marathon in Attike, and there tranquil and honoured she spent the years of her maturity, ever ready to counsel or to aid those who sought her, and rejoicing in the happiness of Elektra her sister, who was wedded to Pylades, and of Orestes and his fair cousin and wife Hermione, but herself a virgin priestess until the day of her death.

At length, full of years and honours, she passed into the Elysian fields, and men raised a tomb to her as to a heroine, and as she had passed through the mortal agony for her people, to her were dedicated costly veils and precious robes of mothers, who had died in giving birth to children.



KASSANDRA.

LEAVE the children here with me, if indeed thou and the queen must return to the city. The sky is over-cast, and the god himself, Apollo the Far-darter, whom thou honourest, will care for them."

It was the priest of Apollo in the ancient city of Thymbra who spoke, and he to whom he spoke was Priam, the king, who had come from his stately city of Ilium to offer sacrifice to the Thymbrian Apollo, and to consult his priest on matters relating to his kingdom.

"The sky is indeed over-cast," said Hekabe, the queen; "we shall scarce by fast driving reach the city before Jove, delighting in thunder, lashes the earth with his rains. If Ilioneus the priest will keep the children, and Laodice, their nurse, for this one night, it will be better for them."

"And Helenus will take care of the little Cassandra?" said the king, laying his hand on the shoulder of his little son. The boy looked up in his

father's face, and put his arm about his sister's neck for answer; and the king and queen got quickly into their chariot, and drove with all speed towards Ilium. The clouds meanwhile gathered black and jagged, the thunder roared, the lightning flashed, and the children stood gazing at it, troubled in their hearts for their father and mother; until Ilioneus the priest came to them, and took them to his own apartments, where they found a repast spread of honey and the fruits, which grew in the sacred grounds of the temple, with cakes of unleavened bread such as the priests ate.

The hungry children soon forgot the storm and their parents in the pleasure of that feast; never were there such clusters of grapes, such figs or such crisp thin cakes; and the honey, fragrant with the thyme growing on the lovely slopes of Kallikolone, and the sparkling water from the sources of the Simois were more delicious to them than any honey or water they had ever tasted at home; but sweeter still was the quiet of the great temple, and the white hair and grave tenderness of the aged priest. But in spite of all, dewy sleep began to weigh down their eyelids, and Laodice the nurse laid them to rest—Helenus five years old, Cassandra three—and they were soon wrapt in the sweet, dreamless sleep that nourishes the life of little children.

All night long they slept their happy sleep, but when morning was now red in the east, Laodice, who lay at their feet, was roused by a cry from the little Kas-

sandra, and starting up, she beheld to her amazement, two large serpents winding about the children, who, no whit alarmed, were playing with the lithe creatures, and delighting in their movements. Laodice uttered a shriek of alarm, which brought Ilioneus the priest, already paying his orisons to the rising Phoebus.

"Hist!" cried the priest, holding back the nurse, who was rushing to the children; "know'st thou not that these are the messengers of Phoebus? Fright them not, they bode blessing, not evil to the children."

"Look! look! they are darting their forked tongues!" cried the nurse in despair, trying to shake off the grasp of the priest: he held her firm, but the serpents, startled at her cry, lifted their heads, unwound themselves from the bodies of the children, and moving side by side, passed by the priest and the nurse and, gliding into the shrine, disappeared under the altar of the god.

Then Ilioneus let Laodice go, and advancing to the bed where the children sat gazing, bewildered, after their late playfellows, "Fear not, happy children," he cried, "ye whom the god himself hath honoured. The holy serpents would have purged their mortal senses," said he, turning to the nurse; "so that the voices of nature, the songs of birds, and the sounds of the forest would have been to them as spoken language; and the present, the past, and the future, would have been revealed to them. Yea, woman, be it known to thee, that if thy foolish panic had not

frustrated the gracious purposes of the god, these children had this night received a gift more splendid than their royal birth, the great gift of prophecy which would make them as gods among men."

"A mighty gift truly," said Laodice, still trembling, "yet methinks the children of Priam and Hekabe might be esteemed sufficiently blessed. A prophet foresees trouble, but he can rarely avert it."

From that day the children ceased to be as they had been. They grew thoughtful beyond their years, loving the woods and flowing streams and all the multitudinous voices of nature; childish toys and games ceased to give them pleasure, but even from their tender years their souls were drawn to the cares and thoughts of men, especially Cassandra, who, with her lovely, earnest eyes always straining after the unseen, became a wonder to her parents and to her brothers and sisters. But Priam and his queen did not like the story of the serpents to be commonly talked of, for of all their daughters Cassandra was the fairest, and likely to make a splendid marriage.

Years passed by, and at length Phoebus himself beheld and loved the solitary maid, and wooed her with song and music; but she, bent only on reading the future, cried:—

"Give me, O give me to know what things are coming upon the earth!"

"It is a dangerous gift for mortal woman!" cried the son of Latone. "Be content to be loved by

me, and let me guard thee rather from knowledge of the future."

"Nay, grant me to know what is to be, and I am thine for ever!"

Then the god touched her tongue and her ears, and her senses were at once enlarged, so that she could hear sounds and see sights beyond the ken of ordinary men, and the maiden trembled at the flood of knowledge that rushed into her soul. In vain Phoebus called her by her name, and begged her to keep her promise to him.

"Ah!" shrieked the maiden, her rapt eyes gazing into the future, "I know not what it is thou wouldst have. Seest thou those sights and sounds of woe that crowd upon my senses? Seest thou yon foreign woman, with the boy Alexander leading her? Seest thou?"

"Turn, thine eyes upon me, Cassandra, and keep thy promise," said the angry god. "Have I not loved thee from a child?"

"Alas! alas!" cried Cassandra, wringing her hands, "let me go! let me go! Even now Alexander is asking of the king a ship and rowers to go a-seafaring. Shame on him for leaving poor Oenone! Let me go. If I warn Priam of the woe and mischief which will come of his voyaging, it may not yet be too late."

Then Phoebus caught her in his arms, and would have held her; but she broke from him, uttering cries of lamentation, and rushed towards the palace.

"Faithless maiden!" shouted Phoebus, in wrath, "I take not from thee the gift I gave thee in the faith of thy promise, for that gift will be thy bitterest punishment. Peer into the future; behold sin and sorrow yet to come, without power to prevent one sin, to avert one woe; for I will harden and dull the hearts of those to whom thou prophesiest, so that they shall regard thee as a vain babblers, and place no faith in thy words."

So saying, the angry god leapt into his chariot, and was no more seen by Cassandra; but his cruel will was accomplished. Every separate sin and sorrow which wore the hearts of king and people was foreknown by her, proclaimed by her. But though event after event showed her predictions true, her people continued to disregard her warnings, and to treat her as a vain enthusiast. Alexander received the ship, and gathered about him a goodly company of powers, in spite of her remonstrance. Helene came and was received, and Menelaus and Odysseus, when they came to demand her back, were sent away empty, though she made the palace ring with her cries, foretelling devastation to the flower-enamelled meadows of the Simois, foretelling death to man and dishonour to woman. Yet, in spite of her sorrow—nay, perhaps because of it, her beauty grew ever more remarkable as the colour of the rose is deepened by the frost; and, though the fortunes of Troy waxed darker and darker, there never were wanting wooers, who came to the

city drawn by the fatal light of her beauty, who would willingly have wedded her without dower, and who, failing to win her, 'fattened the fields of Ilium with their blood—Othryoneus of Cerberus, who fell beneath the lance of Idomeneus; Koroebus, son of Mygdon, who fell in the last dreadful night, in the vain attempt to rescue her; and many more whose names live not in the verses of the poets.

"Speak not to me of wedlock!" she would exclaim. "No nuptial torches are kindled for me: the fire-brands which blaze for me are kindled to burn these vaunted palaces. Fly, generous youth, fly while yet there is time. The ruin of Ilium is decreed; the wood is felled, the nails are forged which shall frame the fatal engine which is to enter these god-built walls. Fly thou, while yet there is time. Thou owest no duty to King, Priam, or to this city: fly while yet thou canst, lest thy blood be shed to no purpose, and thy mother be left childless among women."

So she warned and entreated, but, with a love that would not be thwarted, they hung about her: "If I may not live for thee, Cassandra, I can at least die for thee," would they say.

When Hektor of the glancing helm was slain, and the king, by Jove's command, was gone to ransom his body while Hekabe and Andromache mourned hopeless in their chambers, Cassandra mounted the watch-tower of Pergamus hopeful when all were despairing, and beholding from afar Priam and Idæus, his charioteer,

scouring over the plain, she knew that they were bringing home the body of her dear brother, and lifting her voice, then for the first time not heard in vain, she called on all the men and women of Troy to go forth and welcome for the last time that Hektor whom they had so often brought in victorious, and whom they were bound to honour for all that he had done for them.

Hektor slain and due honour paid to his beloved corse, what was there for the maiden's prophetic eyes to behold but the garnering in of the fell harvest of sin and pride?

How in the sacking of the city the very statue of Athene could hardly save her from the grasp of Ajax Oïleus, how in the division of the spoil she was assigned to Agamemnon, the king of men, as the fairest prize where many were so fair, has been told in stone and in verse by sculptor and by poet. Agamemnon, delighted with her beauty, carried her home to Argos, but would give no heed to her warnings of dishonour and death awaiting him in his own home.

Hapless Cassandra ! doomed to share the fate of him she loved not. Klytaemnestra had no pity for her beauty or for her helpless state. The king had driven up to his palace-gates with her beside him ; and though faithless to him herself, the queen would not brook the contempt of herself which it argued. Cassandra was beloved by him. It was enough. She also should die, and die with him.

Oh ! the supreme agony of that hour when Agamemnon had gone into the house, like a bird into the net of the fowler, and Kassandra lingered without, still standing in the chariot.

Klytaemnestra, with a false show of pity, counselled her to be patient, reminding her that even Herakles had been a slave, but she could draw neither word nor sign from the daughter of Priam, and the queen gave up her attempt, concluding that her words were unintelligible to the foreign captive. She little knew how far too well the Trojan princess knew both what she said and what she was about to do.

When Klytaemnestra had desisted, and had passed into the house bent on her terrible errand, Kassandra lifted her head and uttered shriek upon shriek, for all the dread story of the Atreids passed before her eyes, culminating in the slaughter of the king even then enacting within the walls.

Then, with steadfast feet, she passed into the palace to the fate she well foreknew, praying only, with a touch of weakness, that the blow might strike her in a fatal spot, so that her passage to the house of Hades might be easy.

So lived and so died Kassandra the prophetess, fairest and holiest of the daughters of Priam, who loved her country with a devotion not inferior to that of Hektor himself, who bore even more than he the burden of the sins of her kinsfolk, to whom the foreknowledge of their sorrows was an ever-present grief, and who never

ceased to warn those who would not hearken. Surely to her, if to any one, the calm retreats of Elysium, entered even through the dark portal of a violent death, must have been welcome. How sweet to her the society of the good! how restful the company of those kindred souls who, in all ages, have toiled and striven for their brethren.

Men showed her tomb in Mycenae, where she was worshipped almost like that other unhappy maiden, Iphigeneia, by those who were hard driven by the toils of life. The tomb is shown no more, for sheep and wild goats graze over it, but the name of Cassandra passes from time to time through the melodies of the poets, like the summer winds sighing as they touch Aeolian strings.



LAODAMEIA.

O MY lord, the time is all too short ! Consider how many need thy presence here ; what plans for the happiness of the people and the improvement of the city must come to naught if thou goest. The people and the land are given into thy care by Zeus himself ; thou canst not give them up. Why must this unhappy Helene be the cause of widowed beds and tearr to so many women who, but for her, had been happy wives and mothers ? Tarry, my lord, tarry at home. Here the very trees and fountains rejoice in thy presence ; here thou art a very sun of joy to men. Go not to yonder proud city to waste strength and manhood on a quarrel that is none of thine."

Protesilaus, the king, bowed his head to kiss the brow and lips of his pleading wife, who, with clinging arms and supplicating voice, would fain have held him back.

" True, Laodameia, the quarrel is none of mine, but

the oath is mine, and a man must abide by his oath, as thou well knowest, whatever may betide him. Alas! thou knowest not how much this keeping of the oath which the son of Laertes won from us by subtlety costs me; thou knowest not how gladly I would spend all my days here with thee, and lead the happy life we have lived together until the end. But, dearest wife, I must, even for thy sake, be true in this matter. How could I look men in the face if I alone of the Achæan kings hung back? Take courage, my queen; it must never be said that Laodameia, daughter of Akastus, had reason to blush because she was called the wife of Protesilaus."

Then Laodameia held her peace and tried to be patient, and Protesilaus, the king, marshalled his men, gathering a great host of nearly five thousand men, to plough the wide backs of the sea in forty black ships, and with him sailed the gallant Podarkes, his brother. From peace and hopeful work they went to strife and bloodshed, and Laodameia, the queen, remained in Phylace, wearying for her lord, and finding her only comfort in sacrifice and prayer to all the gods, but most of all to Demeter, the great goddess who had fixed her favourite home in flower-enamelled Pyrrhasus, and who loved all the land of Protesilaus for its richness and its beauty.

Day by day the queen besieged the gods with prayers for the king, finding all her comfort in carrying on the works which he had set on foot, and made

happy and hopeful if tidings came of Protesilaus ; and during the weary weeks that the vast Achæan fleet lay wind-bound at Aulis, Protesilaus contrived to send frequent messages to his queen, and to receive tidings from her in return.

But now Artemis was appeased, the fleet spread its thousand sails, and the young men rowed and sped over the blue Aegean past the shining Cyklades.

At the holy island, where the twin children of Latona were born, and where a fair temple rose to the divine Bow-bearer, they came to land, and Agamemnon offered sacrifice, consulting the god as to how they should approach the shore and effect a landing on the plains of Troy ; then a voice rang out clearly from the shrine—

“Go forward, fear not, Atreus’ noble son,
The wind shall fill thy sails, the shore be won ;
But he who first shall leap upon the shore
From his well-bench’d, black ship shall rue it sore ;
The Moiræ will it that this chief be slain,
And with his life-blood drench the sandy plain.”

At this response of the oracle a chill ran through the assembled chiefs ; all the manhood of the Achæans trembled. Achilles himself turned pale. He knew that he must die early. He had chosen a short and glorious life. Was this the glory, to give his life for the host before he had looked upon the god-built walls of Troy—before he had changed a blow with Hektor, the slayer of men—to die, leaping from his ship on to

the shore? He had looked death in the face many a time in the chase, in the foray, by flood and field, but to go calmly to certain death, deliberately to choose to die, was beyond the virtue of the beautiful and passionate son of Thetis. Odysseus pondered the words, but felt they were not for him. He must live to counsel the chiefs and bring them home again. If he flung away his life as the purchase-money of the landing of the host, how would it fare with all the gallant armament left to the guidance of the rash and haughty Agamemnon? And how would it fare with the little Telemachus, with Penelope, with his parents Laertes and Antikleia, and with his beloved Ithake? Odysseus shook his head. The fate was a glorious one, but it was not for him to covet. Diomedes and Ajax pondered the words, each in his own way. Not a king, not a man of note in all the host who did not hear them ringing in his ears when he laid him down to sleep and when he rose in the morning; but when the grey old city lay before them, its battlements crowded with eager old men, women, and children, and the whole shore flashing with helmets and breastplates and bristling with spears, the Achaean armament paused. The black galleys lay still on the waters, for the sails were taken down and the oars were lifted in the air; then one galley pushed stoutly on, and one chief in flashing armour leapt upon the shore, with a shout that rung from Ilion to Tenedos. Then ship after ship was driven upon the beach, and the crews leapt eagerly into the sea

and fought hand to hand with the Trojans, secure of victory, for the price had been paid. But it was not until the Trojans had shut themselves up in their walls and the Achæans had leisure to repose, that the word passed from mouth to mouth that he who had won the day for them was the gallant Protesilaus, king of Phylake, to whom life might be supposed to be as sweet as to any in the host.

Tidings were sent by the council of the chiefs to the widowed queen of the devotion of her husband, and she drank in with thirsty ears every word of the messenger, proud of his virtue, though smitten to the heart by the loss of him.

"He was too noble, alas! he was too noble," she cried; "but the gods are merciful, and it is not possible but that they will take pity on me. It was they who put it into his heart to make this sacrifice. What woman was ever so bereft as I? Fatherless, motherless, and childless; there is no one on whom I can pour out the treasure of my love. The gods below hearkened to Orpheus when he sought his Eurydice. Was Admetus worthy to receive from the hand of Herakles the wife whom he had allowed to perish for him; and shall it not be given to me once again to behold my husband?"

Then with sacrifice by night and day, with prayers to gods above and gods below, the poor lady wrestled with her fate, until Proserpina pitied, and Zeus permitted Hermes, the kindly interpreter between gods

and men, to conduct Protesilaus once again to his home. There for three hours of agony and joy Laodameia once more beheld him she loved, but he who had passed the Styx and dwelt in Elysium, was so purged of earthly passion, that the impetuous love of his queen saddened instead of gladdened him, his etherealized form escaped her arms when she would have embraced him, and with high reasoning and pure counsel, he strove to win her to a patient submission to the will of the gods. Laodameia listened and strove to obey; but when the fated time was come, and Hermes returned to conduct the hero back to the shadowy realms which were now his home, all reason and self-control vanished in an agony of grief; Laodameia shrieked aloud as the two passed into the darkness, and, when her attendants came hurrying at her cry, they lifted from the floor a lifeless woman.

But she whose life had been shortened by her unreasoning passion, and who, having enjoyed the rare honour of a husband altogether noble, had been unable to bear the loss of his bodily presence with her, was not permitted at once to join him in the happy fields. Proserpina decreed that she must first learn self-control and resignation apart, and not until the years allotted by the Moirae to her mortal life were passed, was Hermes permitted to conduct her to the happy fields, to dwell for ever with Protesilaus, and all good men and women who have earned that peaceful home by their virtue.

The Achaeans buried their champion on the shore of the Hellespont, and men showed a mighty mound of earth from which grew a knot of trees, and they called it the tomb and the grove of Protesilaus, in memory of whom those trees, as they said, showed a strange half human sympathy.

“For ever when such height they had attain’d,¹¹
That Ilium’s walls were subject to their view,
The trees’ tall summits wither’d at the sight,
A constant interchange of growth and blight.”



NOTES.

NOTE 1.

Delos received Latona when she was persecuted by Hera, and no other land would give her shelter. Phoebus Apollo and Artemis, the twin deities, were born in the hospitable little island which was henceforth one of the principal seats of the worship of Phoebus, who is frequently called the Delian God.

• See KEIGHTLEY'S *Mythology*, pp. 102, 103.

NOTE 2.

Moiræ. Goddesses whose office it was to assign their lot in life to men. They are called daughters of Zeus and Themis (law), but even Zeus himself was bound by their decrees.

See KEIGHTLEY'S *Mythology*, p. 172.

NOTE 3.

Daphne, daughter of the Peneus, delighted in the life of a huntress; she unhappily attracted the love of Phoebus, who would fain have made her his wife; the frightened maid, unable to escape his pursuit, called on her father for help, and the river god changed her into a laurel, henceforth the sacred tree of Phoebus. The legend is very prettily told by Ovid.

Metamorphoses, Book i. l. 452.

NOTE 4.

Thanatos is represented by Euripides as coming in person to claim Alcestitis. He appears to have been represented as a beautiful dusky youth, with none of the grotesque horrors of the later ideas : he is twin brother to Sleep.

See KEIGHTLEY'S *Mythology*, p. 177.

NOTE 5.

Zeus Zenius. Zeus, who guarded the *Zenos*, the guest-friend, *i.e.* the foreigner. The relation of Zenia was as sacred among the Achaeans as among the Hebrews ; the conduct of Admetus to Herakles is a beautiful illustration of the honour paid to the stranger ; Achacan and Hellenic story abounds in similar instances.

NOTE 6.

Thamyris.

"Anti Dorian where the Muses met,
With Thamyris of Thrace and made him cease
From song as from Oechalia he came,
Leaving the court of Eurylus, for he
Boasting, declared that he would conquer all,
Yea, though the Muses sang with him themselves,
Daughters of Aegis-bearing Jove, in wrath ;
They made him blind and took away his song,
And caused him to forget his minstrelsy."

HOMER, L. II. 595-600.

NOTE 7.

Apian land, the name given by Homer to the Peloponnese.

NOTE 8.

Atē (mischief), inevitable evil that pursues certain men or houses to their ruin.

NOTE 9.

The *Clashers*, literal translation of Sumplēgadēs, the rocks at the entrance of the Black Sea, now called the Pavorane, which from their appearing more or less open or confined, according to the course of the vessel, were said by the poets to open and shut upon the ships which entered, and crush them to pieces.

MAJOR'S *notes to Medea*.

NOTE 10.

Zeus *Sōter*, the saviour or deliverer.

NOTE 11.

These are the closing lines of Wordsworth's beautiful poem, "Laodamia."

